

Yale Law School
Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository

Faculty Scholarship Series

Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship

1-1-1995

Amor Fati (The Love of Fate)

Anthony Townsend Kronman
Yale Law School

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kronman, Anthony Townsend, "Amor Fati (The Love of Fate)" (1995). *Faculty Scholarship Series*. Paper 1057.
http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/1057

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship at Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship Series by an authorized administrator of Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact julian.aiken@yale.edu.

Anthony T. Kronman*

AMOR FATI
(THE LOVE OF FATE)†

Ours is the least tragic age the world has ever known. Of course we have our share of loneliness and disappointment and other familiar human woes, of what Freud called the 'ordinary unhappiness of living.' And as far as wickedness is concerned, the twentieth century, with its holocausts and death camps, has set, perhaps, a record. Isaiah Berlin called it the worst century in European history and said that having seen its horrors, he was now happy to be old. But tragedy is not the same as wickedness or woe. Today we use the word to convey a strictly quantitative judgment. We use it to describe any suffering of a sizable kind. But in its original Greek sense tragedy denotes not just a certain magnitude of suffering but also, and more importantly, an attitude towards it, an attitude that is rooted in a passion which the deepest currents of our modern civilization all oppose.

I shall call this passion the love of fate. I believe the love of fate is a permanent and unique part of our makeup as human beings, a passion which the tragic plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles did not invent but merely gratified in a powerful way, and which remains alive in each of us today. But I also believe that the civilization which has grown up in Europe in the last four hundred years and whose destiny it is, as Max Weber understood, to rule the world, rests upon a moral ideal that denies all legitimacy to our human love of fate and that demands its suppression in every area of life. And I believe, finally, that the suppression of this feeling – which can be denied and discouraged but never destroyed – has left us in a position where we are now able to view only as senseless and stupid two of the greatest discoveries that any human being can ever make: the discovery that one's own individual career in the world is inevitably, to some degree, a piece of fate, and the discovery of the world itself as a fate to which we are delivered by the fact of our existence. The moral ideals of our civilization give us no resources to find comfort or joy in these discoveries. They cause us, instead, to recoil from them with loathing and dread. As inhabitants of the modern world it is, in short, our fate – as Weber himself might have

* Yale Law School.

† Delivered as the Cecil A. Wright Memorial Lecture at the University of Toronto on 4 November 1994.

said with his usual irony – to have been born into an age whose ideals deny, more emphatically and systematically than any other, the love of fate from which all tragic pleasure springs.

Let me start by saying something more about this pleasure itself. At the very beginning of *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus appears on stage and makes a speech in which he describes himself as a man whose fame is known to all. Everyone (in the audience as well as in the play) recognizes and admires Oedipus, who solved the riddle of the Sphinx and rescued Thebes from the monster's control. What enabled Oedipus to do this, we all know, was his intelligence, his power of reasoning, which he himself mentions with pride several times in the opening scenes of the play. In essence, Oedipus saved Thebes with his mind, and by doing so became an emblem of the universal human hope that the forces which afflict mankind – all the Sphinxes of the world – can be controlled by reason and skill.

In the action that follows we see this hope defeated. We see Oedipus – a paragon of reason, the unriddler of the world, a leader in the human struggle to master events and transform fate into control – himself undone by fate, by luck, and by the awful destiny the gods have prepared for him and his family. What is the point of this spectacle of defeat? What feelings does it arouse in those who watch it? Aristotle (who understood tragedy from the standpoint of philosophy, and therefore incompletely) surmised that the pleasure of seeing Oedipus destroyed by fate comes from the knowledge that one is very much like Oedipus and might, if things had worked out differently, been in his position too, together with the awareness that one is not in fact in Oedipus' situation, but comfortably removed from it, sitting in a theatre watching a play that is separate from one's own life. It is this combination of identification and detachment which, on Aristotle's view, creates the pleasure in tragedy, a feeling he likens to the relief that comes with purgation. But Aristotle's account of tragedy misses something important. It misses the fact that Oedipus' downfall makes us shudder with delight not just because we hate the prospect of losing control and take pleasure in the knowledge that we are safely distant from someone who has, but because we love this prospect too. It excites us to see Oedipus undone because it gratifies one of our deepest desires – the longing to be released from the human struggle to master fate and to be swept away by it instead, the wish to be carried along by events instead of controlling them through mind. To achieve such control is one of our most powerful ambitions, and yet there is something in the defeat of this ambition that excites us too. Oedipus is our champion in the human war against fate, and we want to see him succeed. We want to see his intelligence triumph. But at the same time,

we are thrilled by his defeat because, in some part of our soul, we desire our own as well (and not just, as Aristotle said, because we fear it). This is the secret of tragic pleasure and those, like Aristotle, who fail to appreciate the human love of fate can never grasp it.

Still, Aristotle's account of tragedy has an appealing common sense. Mine, by contrast, seems perverse. What kind of creature is it, after all, that takes pleasure in its own defeat? Perhaps some individual human beings are moved by a love of fate, but surely they are freaks, outliers, exceptions to the rule. What possible justification can there be for the claim that the love of fate is, as I put it a moment ago, a permanent and unique part of our makeup, an aspect of human nature, and not just a perversion that a few maladjusted individuals display to which most normal men and women are immune? This is as deep and interesting a question as I know, and I shall make no pretence of answering it fully. But everything else I want to say depends upon my answer to it, and so I must at least attempt a sketch. Once again I shall take my start from Sophocles, this time from the famous chorus in *Antigone*, sometimes called the 'Ode on Man,' that celebrates the uniqueness of human beings and their achievements. These are Sophocles' timeless and haunting words:

There are many amazing things in the world,
 But none more amazing than man.
 He sails the gray sea, beneath towering waves,
 Driven by the wintry south wind.
 And the earth – oldest of the gods and imperishable –
 He tills endlessly, year after year,
 His ploughs wheeling round,
 Turning the soil over with the offspring of horses.

Swarms of lightminded birds he snares and leads away captive,
 And all kinds of wild animals,
 And the fish of the sea, too, trapped in the woven coils of his nets –
 Man who is so clever.
 With his cleverness he rules the beast of the field and the mountain.
 And the shaggy-necked horse and untiring bull
 He brings under his neck-girdling yoke.

And speech, and thought swift as wind, and the spirit of lawabidingness, he has
 taught himself,
 And how to flee the shafts of frost that fall on him, without concern, in the
 stormy open air –
 All-inventive man.

To none of the tasks he would accomplish does man come unequipped.
Only from death shall he devise no escape.
But for other harsh afflictions, he has through joint effort discovered the cure.

With a cleverness, a skillful ingenuity, exceeding expectation
Man tends at one moment to what is bad,
At another to what is good.
When he joins lawfulness to justice, upheld by an oath sworn to the gods of the
land,
A man is honored in his city.
But whoever recklessly consorts with what is bad,
That man is an outlaw.
May he who inclines toward what is bad
Become neither a hearth-mate of mine nor a political ally.

What is the picture of human nature that emerges from these lines? It is the picture, first of all, of a restless, inventive, and powerful creature that is able to transform the conditions of its own existence in a way no other being can. Partly men do this through technology, which alters their relation to the natural world, and partly they do it through law, which transforms their relations to one another by giving them a uniquely normative cast. Other creatures do amazing things, and many have built-in bodily powers that human beings lack (like the power of flight). But only man possesses technology and law, and the immensely expanded powers these afford.

The common root of both technology and law is mind, or what Sophocles calls 'thought swift as wind.' The poet does not tell us what mind is, but he gives us a valuable clue. One of the chorus's dominant images is that of man as a trapper and tamer – a builder of snares, nets, yokes, and other implements of capture. Of course, other animals build traps too – spiders, for example. But they build them in an instinctive and not a thoughtful way, and if we ask what the difference is, no better answer has ever been given than the one Marx offered in *Capital* when he observed that the worst of architects differs from the best of bees in that he erects in his imagination, before he begins, a model of the object he wishes to construct. What enables the human architect to do this – and hence what distinguishes him most fundamentally from the bee – is his consciousness of time, the fact that he is aware of time and not merely (as every living creature is) caught in it. It is the architect's consciousness of time that permits him to conceive the idea of a future state of affairs different from the present one, and to plan with the future in mind. And it is this same consciousness of time that enables

the architect to form a distinction between what changes and what does not and in that way to comprehend the notion of a rule or principle or law that remains the same from one moment to the next – to form abstractions. The ability to plan and to form abstractions – which has as its precondition a consciousness of time that man alone possesses – distinguishes all technology from instinct, however clumsy the first and sure the second may be. And this same ability, from which technology in its endless variety springs, is the source of law as well, for what makes man a law-abiding creature is the capacity, as Kant puts it, for action in accordance with the conception of a rule, an action that only a being conscious of time can perform. Other animals live law-like lives in the sense that their behaviour conforms to a regular pattern. But among earthly creatures only man is able to act not just in accordance with a rule but for its sake, which presupposes that he is able to grasp the concept of a rule, which in turn assumes the capacity to form abstractions, which requires, finally, as the most elementary fact of all, the consciousness of time that sets man apart from other living beings. It is from man's unique consciousness of time that the realms of technology and law, which he alone inhabits, both derive.

All living beings – the birds that fly, the fish that swim, the beasts 'of the field and the mountain' – possess distinctive powers of their own, the ability to move and act in certain ways, whose exercise gives each creature a characteristic look and way of life. Aristotle called this the creature's *eidos*, a word we ordinarily translate as 'form,' but which in its original meaning signifies simply the looks or visible shape of a thing – a meaning the Latin word *species* translates exactly. In this general sense, man too has an *eidos*, a distinctive look and way of life. The human way of life includes things like ploughs and nets and houses and medicine and cities and law, and it is the presence of these things in man's life that give it its distinctive shape. Human life looks the way it does because mind is present in it. This is the first and most obvious way in which the human *eidos* is unique. But there is a second and even deeper sense in which man's possession of the power of thought makes the life of his species unique, for this power gives man – and man alone – an *eidos* that is self-transforming.

Aristotle believed the different species of living things to be immortal; he thought their looks and way of life (in contrast to the lives of individuals) to be invulnerable to accidents and hence unchanging. We now know this to be wrong. The *eidei* of living things change over time. They change as a result of evolutionary forces that depend crucially on accidents, on random mutation. But man's way of life has changed not only in this way, but in another one as well. It has been transformed not

just accidentally, from without, but also from within, through the exercise of the power of thought that gives human life its distinctive *eidōs*. From thought comes technology and from technology comes an accumulation of material powers that changes the character of man's relation to nature from one generation to the next. And from thought comes law, which also accumulates, altering the normative conditions from which succeeding generations of human beings start their adventure in the world. The accumulation of material powers and the accumulation of laws change the visible shape of human life – in the most literal sense, they transform it – and they do so through the operation of mind, of the power that is most distinctively man's own. Unlike other creatures, human beings thus possess an *eidōs* that is essentially self-transforming. In contrast to all other living things man makes his own species-being, to borrow a phrase from Marx. Or, to borrow again from Marx (and also, of course, from Hegel), man alone among the earth's creatures has an essentially historical nature.

If the human *eidōs* – the species-being of mankind as a whole – is essentially self-transforming, the same is also true of the lives of the individual human beings who at any given moment embody this *eidōs* in a concrete way. Aristotle believed that the form of every species (man included) defines a pattern of sequential changes through which the members of the species move from birth to death. It defines, he said, a process of maturation in which the powers peculiar to that kind of thing are developed, and then exercised, and finally weakened as the individual declines from the peak of its powers towards death. Aristotle recognized, of course, that the individual members of a species do not always display its distinctive pattern of maturation in their lives. Some individuals, for example, are born deformed as a result of prenatal accidents, and others are prevented by postnatal accidents – by disabling injuries and early death – from fully achieving the patterned career of their kind. And he recognized, too, that even in the normal case every individual has peculiar traits that set it apart from the other members of its species, but he insisted that these do not belong to the form or *eidōs* of the species itself. Every cat, for example, has certain distinctive characteristics that set it apart from all others, that make it truly individual, but these individuating features, Aristotle claimed, are not themselves a part of the cat's species-being. They are accidents that fall outside the cat's *eidōs* or essence.

In man's case, however, and only in his, individuality is an aspect of essence. Human beings possess the power to live their lives, as Royce said, in accordance with a plan. They have the power to live, as we might say, autobiographically, to be both the author and the subject of

their lives, and it is through the exercise of this uniquely human power that men and women become distinctive individuals with separate careers of their own. The power to plan one's life, as opposed to merely living it through, is another expression of mind – it is the power of mind applied to oneself – and the individuality it produces is therefore not external to man's essence, as the individuality of other living things is to theirs, but is a constitutive element of it instead. For us, individuation is a part of our nature. To be fully human, I must become an individual with a distinctive career of my own. Doing so is an essential feature of my humanity, an element in the pattern that defines the arc of human life, and not (as in the case of cats and frogs and hemlock trees) merely a by-product of the pattern's embodiment in the material stuff of which human beings, like all other living things, are made. Thus if we may summarize the uniqueness of human nature, at the species level, by saying that it is essentially and not just accidentally dynamic, self-transforming, and historical, we may summarize its uniqueness at the level of the individual by saying that for man and man alone, it is essential and not just accidental to be an individual. These are the defining features of the human condition, and the common root of both is mind.

At both levels – the species and the individual – human life is therefore marked by distinctive possibilities of self-control. As a species, man alone possesses a self-transforming nature, for only man has an *eidos* or form that is defined by a power – the power of mind – whose own exercise changes the looks and life of the species itself. Among the species of the earth, only mankind may be said to make its own career and not simply to suffer or undergo it. Similarly, it is only individual men and women that possess the power to live their lives in accordance with a plan, to live them autobiographically, and not simply to execute the standard plan of their species in the mindless way that other living things do. The lives of individual human beings are to this extent made and not just suffered, like the career of mankind as a whole, and the more prominent the element of self-direction is in them, the more human they become. To use a modern term, of Kantian origin, we might say that human life is set apart, at both the species and individual levels, by its autonomous or self-determining character, by the presence in it of a power of self-control that has its roots in the consciousness of time that is the transcendental precondition – another Kantian phrase – of all reflexive self-awareness, of abstraction and of moral life.

Every living being, Aristotle rightly said, has a drive towards fulfilment – a built-in desire to become all that it can be, to develop and exercise the powers that belong uniquely to its kind. Human beings

share this desire too, which in their case takes the form of a drive towards autonomy or self-control. They are constantly struggling, individually and collectively, to widen the space within which their lives can be controlled rather than passively suffered. This is the process that Sophocles describes in his famous chorus: man's ongoing battle against disease, and distance, and the hostile forces of the earth. These are all obstacles to the full development of mankind's distinctive power of self-control, barriers to the capacity that human beings possess to shape their lives and not just suffer them as a species and as individuals. The further back these obstacles are pushed the closer human beings come to the full realization of their true nature or form. In the process, we might say, mankind itself is humanized. It comes more fully into the possession of its own essential powers, both at the individual and species levels, and hence approaches ever more closely the condition of fulfilment uniquely appropriate to it.

Here, however, we come to a thought that is first suggested in Sophocles' chorus by his matter-of-fact line about death. After describing man's amazing achievements, his victories in the struggle to take control of the earth and of his own unruly heart, Sophocles sums up by saying that 'to none of the tasks he would accomplish does man come unequipped,' and then immediately adds a brutal and shocking reminder: 'only from death shall he devise no escape.' This simple sentence reminds us that however developed our powers of self-control, we human beings are all mortal creatures who in the end are doomed to die. That is our fate, a fate we share with other living things, and no extension of self-control, no increase in autonomy, can ever undo it. Our mortality marks the outer limits of mankind's defining desire for self-control, beyond which that desire can never be satisfied. But this desire itself is not a desire for partial control, for autonomy within limits. It is a desire for perfect control, for complete autonomy, and every limit on it must be experienced by human beings as an obstacle to their fulfilment. From the fact that we are doomed to die, it follows, therefore, that we are doomed to unfulfilment, for the goal we aim at, as beings with mind, is permanently denied to us as beings with bodies. Other living things can achieve fulfilment; indeed, it is only accidents of one kind or another that prevent them from doing so. But man is unfulfilled in his essence. Of all the earth's creatures man is the only one unhappy by nature, and that is because he alone among living things aims at a goal beyond his reach.

As beings endowed with intelligence or mind, we have a desire for control that our mortal nature prevents us from achieving except in a partial and therefore always unsatisfying way. We cannot escape this

dilemma by fully satisfying the desire that creates it, for that would be possible only if we could banish death from the world. There is, in the end, only one way this dilemma and the unhappiness that goes with it can be escaped, and that is not by realizing mind's ambition for control but by renouncing it instead. To abandon the human ambition for control is to give oneself over to fate, to allow oneself to be carried along by external powers, to abandon autonomy and embrace dependence instead. The desire to do this is the love of fate, a passion that only human beings feel, for though all living creatures are subject to fate, man alone is drawn to fate by love.

The love of fate is a passion as deeply rooted in our human nature as the passion for control, with which it is dialectically entwined. Each, moreover, aims at a state or condition beyond the human one: the passion for control at a godlike omnipotence that mortality denies us, and the love of fate at a loss of independence that could be achieved only by giving up the power of mind that distinguishes us from the beasts. Neither can ever be fully gratified, therefore, within the human condition. Indeed, we might define that condition as one of permanent tension created by the irreconcilable conflict between two opposing desires, one born of the unhappiness produced by the necessary unfulfilment of the other, and both aiming at a state beyond the limits of human life. To express the same point more paradoxically, our humanity is constituted by the struggle between two antagonistic desires that seek in opposite ways to abolish the creature whose distinctive species-being is constituted by their endless battle. Of all the amazing things about man, this is the most amazing of all.

From the desire for control come technology and law. From the love of fate come comedy and tragedy, which are also uniquely human inventions. The related pleasures that comedy and tragedy produce spring, in each case, from the humiliation of mind. Comedy and tragedy both show us mind brought low, flummoxed, disappointed, confused, suffering the embarrassments of the body, a victim of chance, destiny, and fate. In the one case we laugh and in the other we cry, but these different reactions derive their force from the satisfaction we take in seeing our own human desire for control frustrated and denied, from the gratification of our equally deep wish to be rid of this desire and out of control instead. Technology and law are bound to disappoint us, and it is from this disappointment that our unquenchable appetite for comedy and tragedy grows.

It is against this background that I now want to make a few comments about our philosophical tradition and the shape of the untragic world we presently inhabit, returning in this way to my point of depar-

ture. At the start of our tradition, Plato sought to gratify the human passion for control in a new and more far-reaching fashion. Early in the *Republic* Socrates' friend Glaucon vividly describes two lives, the first a just but unhappy life, in conventional terms at least, and the second the reverse. He then challenges Socrates to prove that the first life is superior to the second – that justice has an intrinsic value which overrides all else. The rest of the *Republic* is Socrates' answer to this challenge. Summarizing brutally, what Socrates says is that true happiness consists in a certain condition of soul, in a certain harmonious arrangement of its parts, and that everyone is able to achieve this condition on his or her own; from which it follows, Socrates argues, that happiness is something within our control and not – as Glaucon's challenge assumes – the product of luck, destiny, and the like. The argument that Socrates elaborates to establish these claims draws its emotional appeal from our passion for control, and its principal enemy – as Socrates himself makes clear – is the love of fate that tragic poetry encourages. Our philosophical tradition thus begins with the definition of philosophy itself as a project of control and an explicit opposition between philosophy and tragedy which, as Socrates accurately portrays it, causes us to take pleasure in the loss of control instead.

This same conception of philosophy – as a project of self-control – is a powerful theme in stoical thought. The stoics emphasized, above all else, the value of *autarkeia* or self-sufficiency, and they developed numerous arguments to show that we can indeed be (as Socrates claimed) the authors of our own happiness and hence self-sufficient in this most important sense. Partly they did this by teaching the unimportance of what we cannot control – death, disease, enslavement, poverty, and the like. But they also did it by teaching that the world is organized in accordance with a plan too complex for human understanding, which nevertheless dictates every occurrence in advance – a plan whose acceptance dissolves all hope and fear (both of which depend on the mistaken belief that things might be other than as they are) and which produces in the soul of the person who accepts it true composure and control. In this last respect, stoicism departs sharply from the program of the *Republic*. For Socrates, the love of fate is the enemy of self-control. It is what gives poetry its dangerous appeal, and is a temptation we must overcome in order to take charge of our lives. In the *Republic* the love of fate (which tragedy satisfies) is opposed to the passion for control (which philosophy reinforces). But in stoicism this opposition disappears. Fatalism ceases to be the enemy of self-control and becomes, instead, a pathway to it. We can be self-sufficient, the stoics claim, only by accepting the fateful order of the world and our des-

tinies within it. We can achieve self-control only by giving it up – a fusion of opposing ideas, and conflicting passions, that is perhaps the most distinctive feature of stoical thought in general.

The passion for control and the love of fate – the deepest and most irreconcilable of human longings, which Plato set in opposition and the stoics sought to fuse – are both given a new and more radical meaning by the Jewish-Christian concept of creation *ex nihilo*, of creation from nothing, a concept unintelligible within the horizon of pagan thought. For the Greeks, all creative activity was to be understood as the imposition of a form on pre-existing matter. There were, therefore, only two sorts of creativity that the Greeks had the intellectual resources to acknowledge: the kind that is involved in craftsmanship – in the artisan's activity – and sexual reproduction. The idea of a divine lord of creation who makes the world from nothing introduces a third kind of inventiveness, and one that is more independent, more self-contained, more autonomous than the two the Greeks acknowledged. Both the craftsman and the parent work on material that is not of their own making, and as a result the shape and success of their creations is partly a function of luck or chance, that is, of powers beyond their control. But the God of the Jews and the Christians is not similarly constrained in His creation. There is nothing in the world He hasn't made, nothing that isn't a part of His design, nothing outside His own creative powers that could conceivably limit their effectiveness and scope. The concept of creation from nothing thus introduces into the vocabulary of Western philosophical thought a notion of perfect self-control which the Greek understanding of form and matter never allowed.

This new and more perfect species of self-control is located by Augustine and others in a power or faculty that was also unknown to the Greeks – the faculty of will. For Plato, the key to self-control lay in the development and exercise of reason. But reason is, in the end, a dependent power that must take its lead from the truth, from reality, from the being of things that exist apart from it. By contrast, as St. Paul discovered, the will can affirm the truth or not, and in this sense it possesses an independence which the faculty of reason lacks. The will is an independent and self-contained power of affirmation or dissent, a power (to use Kant's phrase) of 'self-affection' which, in contrast to reason, directs or determines itself. This is the power that God exercises when He says, '*fiat lux*,' 'let there be light.' But it is also a power that human beings possess, alone among earth's creatures, and it is their possession of the faculty of will that justifies the claim – central to Christian thought – that God made man, and man alone, in His own image.

In Kant's moral philosophy, the Christian concept of the will receives its ultimate philosophical expression. The autonomy of the will is, for Kant, the sole source of moral worth. Everything that affects us from without, everything we passively experience, everything we suffer and do not make, is by contrast, for Kant, utterly without moral value. The actions of the will are within our control – they are the only things that are completely within our control – and while Kant does not deny that we are finite creatures who are liable to suffering of all sorts, he contracts the sphere of what is worthy or valuable in human life to the sphere of self-control that is defined by the autonomy of the will. The dominant passion in Kant's moral writings is the passion for control and a corresponding contempt for everything conditioned by fate (for everything, in Kant's terminology, that is 'heteronomous' in nature). Kant of course shares this passion with Plato – it is their deepest bond – but the concept of the will, of a faculty more self-contained and self-controlling than reason itself, allows him to gratify their common passion more completely.

For the past two hundred years the societies of the West have been engaged in a prolonged effort – halting at first, and with notable interruptions, but in the second half of this century pursued with increasing energy and speed – to make Kant's ideal of autonomy a reality in human life, to bring what he called the 'kingdom of ends' down to earth. For Kant himself, the distance between man and God made this unthinkable. But as the framework of Christian belief that inspired Kant's thought and to which his ideas still belonged has weakened and gradually disappeared as the accepted background to philosophy, the barrier to man's usurpation of God's role as creator of the world has lowered, with the result that the project of making the world into a place where human beings are actually, and not just notionally or hypothetically, self-determining has come to seem more and more plausible. The aim of this project has been to expunge fate from the world – not merely to devalue it in thought, as Kant did, but to eliminate it in fact, to make fate disappear. This can never be done entirely. But our civilization has for some time now been driven by a desire to push fate farther back, to extend our powers of self-control by diminishing the role that fate plays in human life. Every step we take in this direction reminds us, of course, that perfect self-control is unattainable. But the reiterated frustration we experience in achieving this goal today only stimulates us to press on, with even greater resolve, in our campaign to achieve it. At the end of the twentieth century, nothing is more characteristic of our entire civilization than this accelerating rush to realize, in the real world, the anti-fatalistic ideal of self-control that

Kant, still moved by Christian humility, restricted to the kingdom of ends. Our passion to reach this goal now seems boundless, and in the effort to achieve it we have exploited, on an ever-widening scale, the very two forces that Sophocles long ago identified as the source of mankind's amazing power, the forces of technology and law. Through technology we are approaching the point where the whole of nature will be, as Marx put it, a vast industrial system that runs in accordance with a human plan. And through law we are approaching the point where the costs of every accident – of birth or otherwise – will be distributed not on the basis of luck but a scheme of human invention, and no one will ever again be disadvantaged (as Oedipus was) on account of fate. This is the point of perfect control towards which the philosophies of Plato and Kant aspire, and the dream of reaching it is the dream of a world from which the failure of control and the tragic love of fate that it inspires have been banished forever. This is the dream that now moves our civilization at its deepest level.

But even today, as we are swept along in the realms of both technology and law by what Weber called the forces of 'rationalization,' there are stirrings here and there of a tragic sensibility and of the love of fate to which our modern way of life is so profoundly opposed. To put these in context I must return, briefly, to the Christian doctrine of creation and its radicalizing implications. I said, a moment ago, that the idea of creation from nothing gave new and expanded expression to the archaic human desire for control. At the same time, however, it also provided a more radical outlet for mankind's unique love of fate. In the classical period it was mainly comedy and tragedy that performed this function. But a world that has been created from nothing is a world that is all plan and hence, from the standpoint of its inhabitants, all fate, a world in which the opportunities for human self-control are, strictly speaking, zero – something that even the most fatalistic of the tragedians never imagined. Just as the Christian concept of the will represents a more perfect form of self-control than the Greek idea of reason, the Christian notion of providence thus expresses a more perfect fatalism than the classical concept of destiny, which even in Aeschylus and Sophocles never operates in a complete and unerring way. To the human love of fate, therefore, the Christian idea of providence also gave added encouragement and a larger field of expression.

This passion informs the entire Augustinian tradition, which culminates in the fatalistic philosophy of Joseph DeMaistre, the world's first truly reactionary thinker. As a philosopher, DeMaistre is Kant's perfect opposite, for what he teaches, above all else, is the joy of heteronomy, the joy that comes from the abandonment of pride, from

the relinquishment of the belief in man's independent power of control, and the acceptance of God's providence instead. We moderns have been taught to think of ourselves, DeMaistre says, as the authors of the world, as autonomous beings who are able to shape the world in accordance with a plan of our own devising. But this is a terrible mistake, he insists, for even the most independent-seeming of man's actions is in fact controlled by a providential fate. Even the French Revolutionaries – those paragons of pride – are, in DeMaistre's view, merely the unwitting executors of God's plan for the world, a plan that requires, among other things, an immense sacrifice of blood to remove the stain of original sin. God's hand is everywhere, in everything we do, and once we realize this and accept our fate, we will be flooded with the joy that comes, DeMaistre says, from the abandonment of pride and its replacement by obedience, devotion, and sacrifice instead.

The love of fate that animates DeMaistre's bloody picture of the world has its later echoes in the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Unlike DeMaistre, both Nietzsche and Heidegger are post-Christian thinkers, not just in the sense that they reject Christianity but, more importantly, because their views are distinctively shaped by a struggle with it – because they are the apostles of a radicalized paganism whose very radicalness is the product of a confrontation with Christianity itself. The deepened form of fatalism that Christianity makes possible, and which finds such powerful expression in DeMaistre's writings, is for both Nietzsche and Heidegger an essential element in their campaign to retrieve the Greek world and its gods and to portray their recovery as the hallmark of a truly new post-modern age that has yet to begin. In this new age, Nietzsche says, the tragic philosophy of Dionysius will replace the nihilism that represents the terminal stage of decaying Christian belief, and the highest teaching of Dionysius will be the doctrine of *amor fati* – a 'joyous fatalism' that affirms the world as it is, 'without subtraction, exception or selection.' For Heidegger, the new age will begin only when we learn to hear the call of Being once again and put ourselves at its disposal rather than struggling to keep it at ours, when we release ourselves to the world and abandon the effort to appropriate it instead, as the whole tradition of Western metaphysics, on his view, encourages us to do. The joy of Dionysius, who knows how to say yes to the wheel of existence and the endless return of the same, and the joy of the poet who hears the call of Being and gives himself up to its saving power, is the joy of release from the project of control to which our legalistic and technological civilization is so deeply committed. It is the joy of escape from an impossible task, the love of fate that our constitutive unhappiness – our condition of

essential unfulfilment – will always provoke, a love as old as human-kind, to which, in the West at least, Christianity has given a peculiarly radical expression, just as it has done to man's other immortal passion, the love of control.

These last remarks will remind you of something important; perhaps it has been on your mind from the start. I refer to the fact that the love of fate was one of the inspirational sources of Nazism and its murderous program, with which the name of Nietzsche is loosely and that of Heidegger not so loosely connected. Here I want to speak quite plainly. Nazism was an anti-modern movement. Its enemies were freedom, individualism, democracy, the market, enlightenment in all its forms. Against these it opposed destiny, race, and blood – roots for the rootless, the promise of salvation from freedom by fate. For the enlightenment ideal of autonomy or self-control, Nazism substituted an ideal of sacrifice and self-abandonment. In these respects it was, as Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, the secular successor to DeMaistre's providential Christianity and inspired by the same radical love of fate. And in its celebration of death – its erotic beautification of killing and dying – Nazism made clear (what is already apparent in DeMaistre's own writings) that the love of fate tends at the limit to become a love of death, the only complete release we shall ever have from the impossible demands of our nature.

The Second World War was a confrontation between the forces of light and dark, between Nazism's love of fate and the enlightenment tradition, each of which represented the expression of one of mankind's two deepest desires in a specifically post-Christian and hence radicalized form. No sane person, looking back at the event, can possibly regret its outcome. The triumph of Nazism would have meant, quite literally, the death of the whole human world. But what the defeat of Nazism did was to clear the way for a boundless expansion of enlightenment ideals into every area of life, for a tremendous further radicalization of the ethic of autonomy and the passion for control that lies behind it. The result has been the creation of a world from which man's countervailing love of fate has been expelled, just as Socrates demanded that the tragic poets be expelled from the well-ordered city. Indeed, one might say that we have finally achieved Socrates' goal by creating a civilization in which tragedy has no place.

But here and there I think I see the old appetite for tragedy reviving. I think I detect the old love of fate beginning to stir again. For fifty years the horrors of Nazism have made it impossible to speak of fate with respect. But time has passed and the love of fate is gaining strength and respectability, inevitably I think. For it is a passion that

can never be expelled from the human heart. It can be forced underground. It can be embarrassed. It can be made to feel ashamed of itself. But it can never be destroyed entirely. Today it is beginning to creep back into the light. I see it in philosophy, for example, in the writings of Bernard Williams, whose slogan 'moral luck' is meant to challenge the Kantian assumption that only what we control has moral value. I see it in politics, in the growth of the religious right, and the recognition by the progressive left of the need for what Michael Sandel calls an 'encumbered' self. I see it in the resurgent nationalisms that have sprung up in Europe following the collapse of the Cold War, which held them tightly in check. I see it in the environmental movement, in the growing appeal of deep ecology, which I do not fully understand but recognize is hostile to all managerial forms of environmental control. And I see it even in the debates about abortion and pornography, each of which in a different way furthers the rationalization of sexual life and is opposed by some, I think, for that reason itself. In these and other ways our irrepressible love of fate is beginning to assert itself again, against the tide of a civilization that seems determined to destroy it. It will not succeed in doing so. Our love of fate demands gratification and shall have it, in one way or another. The only question is what form the gratification will take, and our only hope is that we can make a place in our restless, democratic, materialistic life for the open expression of tragic feeling – for the love of fate – as the Greeks did once, and only briefly, a very long time ago.