In Anamnesis Voegelin argues that the primary aim of Camus's book The Rebel is to analyze and to overcome the confusions and deformations of modernity - particularly of modern intellectual and political apocalyptic movements, or what Camus calls modern metaphysical and historical rebellion. Voegelin also argues that when Camus wanted to find an alternative to modernity, he did not go rummaging around in the detritus of the age like so many of his contemporaries. Rather, the place he went looking for it was the world of the Greek myth. As usual, Voegelin's interpretation is remarkable. Though it may seem rather little to us now, with these two apparently simple insights, expressed in only a few brief pages, Voegelin managed to say more and more illuminating things about Camus's critique of modernity than had been said in almost twenty years of scholarship by countless Camus experts. Indeed, at the time that Voegelin was making this argument, almost the entire literate world had Camus pegged as endorsing precisely the type of modern existentialism that Voegelin recognized him to be criticizing.

In this paper I want to follow up Voegelin's lead. In the spirit of Voegelin's own critical analyses, I want to examine Camus's history of antiquity, to explore how successful his return to the world of the Greek myth actually was, and to ask how his success or failure in this regard affected his critique of the excesses of modernity and modern metaphysical rebellion. Also in the spirit of Voegelin's work, I hope my discussion will raise a few questions about Voegelin's own assessment of Camus's effort. Voegelin had high praise for Camus's "inexorability in the endeavor for purity as he divest[ed] himself of ersatz realities" (A, 172); and he thought Camus's critique of modern rebellion to be both compelling in its own right and compatible with his own work (A, 171). However, Voegelin also expressed reservations about the adequacy of the alternative Camus offered in place of modernity. These reservations concern Camus's decision to return to the world of the Greek myth, rather than to the optimally differentiated analyses of Plato and Aristotle, and perhaps even more so to Christianity.
Even a quick reading of *The Rebel* makes it clear that the bulk of Camus's historical analysis is devoted to understanding the nature of rebellion in modernity. That analysis occupies some two hundred fifty pages of the book while Camus's discussion of the transition from the Greeks to the Christians is given only ten pages, and is by anyone's standards oddly conceived and notably lacking in historical detail. Yet the importance of this discussion for Camus's analysis as a whole is in no way lessened by its odd character and its sketchy detail, as Voegelin rightly understood. Camus, like Voegelin himself, is always checking the sources, always going back to the transition from the Greeks to the Christians in order to explain the nature and meaning of the modern forms of rebellion with which he was confronted. Indeed, Camus argues that the excesses of the modern history he describes "began with the end of the ancient world [monde antique]" (R, 102; E, 510).

Camus's ancient history is as confusing as it is insightful, however. And its most confusing feature happens to be the contradictory ways in which Camus answers its two most basic questions: When did the ancient world end? And to what must we return to overcome the excesses of our age? In what follows I want to explore Camus's contradictory answers to these questions.

To state the matter rather flatly, I think the primary contradiction in Camus's ancient history lies in his conflicting interpretation of Christianity, and that this contradiction also plays itself out backward and forward into conflicting interpretations of the Greeks and the Jews on the one hand, and of modernity on the other. I think there are two distinct patterns that emerge from these conflicting interpretations, and that what these patterns amount to are two different histories of antiquity, histories that in turn issue in two very different interpretations and assessments of modernity. To speak of there being two different histories in *The Rebel* is, of course, to use a distinction that Camus himself never does, and thus to sharpen an opposition in the text that he never makes explicit analytically. But that is precisely the point. By means of the distinction, and hopefully without doing violence to the text, I want to bring to light a problem in Camus's history of rebellion that has been little discussed by commentators but that helps I think to explain the meaning and significance of a great many confusions and perplexing formulations evident in his analysis.
The basic outlines of these histories can be stated simply. The first is a roughly Christian history of the course of Western civilization, and it is, we might say, the official history of *The Rebel*, appearing as it does in Camus's first and only extended discussion of the traditions of antiquity. Briefly, here Camus argues that Christianity successfully overcame the problems from which metaphysical rebellion arises. These are the problems of "evil and death" which, though constant in human life, had been exacerbated in the West by the Jewish invention of a radically transcendent personal God who is somehow responsible for everything but whose ways do not correspond to any normal human judgement about what is good and what evil (R, 32). The sole textual evidence that Camus offers in support of this claim is the story of Cain and Abel, in which God prefers the latter's sacrifice to the former's "without any convincing motive...and, by so doing, provokes the first murder" (R, 33). Nonetheless, he argues that herein lies the real source of our contemporary history. "The history of rebellion, as we are experiencing it today, has far more to do with the children of Cain than with the disciples of Prometheus. In this sense it is the God of the Old Testament who is primarily responsible for mobilizing the forces of rebellion" (R, 32).

Camus argues that Christianity overcame this Jewish "dedivinization" of the world and its attendant problems by drawing on the Greek notion of "mediation," which it did not merely accept in its original form, but improved by expanding it into the notion of incarnation and by placing that notion at the center of its theodicy (R, 190, 299, 32). Camus writes: "[T]he New Testament can be considered as an attempt to answer, in advance, every Cain in the world, by softening the figure of God and by creating an intercessor between God and man. Christ came to solve two major problems, evil and death, which are precisely the problems that preoccupy the rebel. His solution consisted, first, in experiencing them. The god-man suffers, too--with patience" (R, 32; E, 443-4). Because the Christian God shares fully in the suffering of his creation, the charge that he is unjust is groundless; and because he does so in order to redeem that creation, so too is the charge that he is indifferent. In a word, unlike the Greek gods and the God of the Jews, the Christian God cares.
In light of their shared emphasis on mediation, Camus claims that Christianity and Hellenism are essentially compatible, only here the edge is given to Christianity because of its greater seriousness about evil and death and its despairing hope of resurrection. Because they wrongly reject these Christian truths, modern human beings find themselves once again in the "Judaic world," faced with "the implacable face of a God of hate" who is the antithesis of their highest aspirations and who renders any attempt to conceive a satisfying account of evil and death impossible (R, 33-4). However, rather than admit frankly the impasse to which their rebellion against Christianity had led them, moderns instead push ahead in an effort to complete the dedivinization of the world begun by Judaism and overcome by Christianity, by scornfully rejecting all notion of divinity or transcendence (R, 35). Yet although moderns deny these things, Camus tells us that the "appetite for divinity in the heart of man" remains nonetheless, for them as much as for the religious writers they ostensibly reject (R, 147). Then begins the modern metaphysical rebel's effort to redevinize the world, only this time not by appealing to some old style divinity, but by discovering divinity or meaning in some purely "immanent" phenomenon, whether it be the will of the people, absolute spirit, history, or the will to power (R, 115, 198, 241, 248). In each of these cases Camus claims that the modern ambition is essentially the same as the religious one--namely, it is an attempt to achieve a finality of purpose and meaning amidst the corrosive and seemingly forever imperfect movements of human life (R, 262, 302).

When Camus argues from the standpoint of this first history, he offers a number of different responses to the crisis of modernity and modern rebellion. Though on the surface these responses may seem not only different but even contradictory, if we look at them more closely we can see that they all belie a common acceptance of the Christian understanding of the problem. For instance, sometimes Camus suggests that what is needed in modernity is something very much like a return to orthodox Christianity itself, including acceptance of its notion of the "divinity of Christ" and perhaps even its promise of personal immortality (R, 190, 110). Camus never argues in favour of these Christian teachings explicitly, of course. But he often suggests them indirectly by making provocative, leading remarks about the problems in human life--death, suffering, imperfection--to which they are so obviously an answer and by contrasting the success of this answer to the failure in modernity to find any compelling alternative (R, 100-1, 250, 291). At still other times Camus offers his own version of the mediator--the rebel--who is modeled on the
Christian account of Jesus insofar as he plays a mediating role "between God and history," but who differs from him in that he makes no claim to identity with God and holds out no hope for personal immortality (R, 288, 290). Finally, there are times when Camus seems to abandon altogether the idea that what moderns need is a mediator who will reconcile God and world, in favour of the very modern notion of an immanent, radically dedivinized world in which the aim of human life is to "reconstruct creation itself" in order to give it a meaning or "form it does not have" by nature (R, 267, 262). (3)

II

Camus's second history is very different from his first. Its most striking feature is its claim that the problems from which metaphysical rebellion arises were not solved by Christianity but somehow originate in it. Though hints of this second history can be found throughout the pages in which he develops his first history, (4) Camus states it most clearly and most forcefully when he is describing in detail the nature of modernity and modern rebellion. Here the comparisons between Christianity and modernity begin to arise almost of their own accord. It seems that the closer Camus comes to describing the nature of modern metaphysical rebellion the more its similarities to Christianity impose themselves. In any event, the main difference is this: the role Camus gives to Judaism in the first history he gives to Christianity in the second. Dedivinization, an apocalyptic history ending in a final judgement, messianism, the denigration of reason to the advantage of faith, all these things Camus here attributes to Christianity rather than to Judaism (R, 190, 212, 192-3, 222, 242). Moreover, the notion that modernity is best understood as a continuation of problems and confusions that are distinctively Jewish also changes. Instead of being the historical fulfillment of Judaism (i.e., a radical and more consistent dedivinization) and a perversion of Christianity, Camus here argues that modernity is the fateful outcome of the Christian dedivinization of the world. ""It is the Christian attitude that gradually empties the world of its substance...since the substance resided in a conglomeration of symbols.' These symbols are the drama of the divinity, which unfolds throughout time. Nature is only the setting for this drama" (R, 190). When Camus reasons in this way, not even his argument for the "strength" of the Christian notion of incarnation, which is supposedly the true locus of substance or meaning in history, remains immune from criticism (R, 299). Marx's "deification of man" is nothing but the Christian deification of Jesus consistently applied to all human beings (R, 192);
and despite the disclaimers of his first history, here Camus argues that this deification is inseparable from an apocalyptic messianism of Christian, not Jewish origin that was ultimately appropriated by modern theorists like Hegel, Marx, and Comte and later acted upon by their political successors. "This reconciliation, in any case, is instructive as concerns the Christian origins of all types of historic Messianism, even revolutionary Messianism" (R, 192-3). And to the counter-argument, common among Christians, that despite their phenomenal similarities, the Christian and modern accounts of these things nonetheless differ substantially, Camus replies that "the only difference lies in a change of symbols" (R, 193). The substance remains the same. "Eternity separates them at the beginning, but the doctrines of history end by reuniting them in a realistic conclusion" (R, 193). In the discussion that follows, Camus describes that "realism" as a kind of "outraged puritanism" that is "bent on conquest" and at odds with the "entire ancient world [tout le monde antique] " (R, 193; E, 598).

As I have said, Camus's second history also entails a different understanding and assessment of the Greeks. In his first history Camus interprets Hellenism and Christianity as compatible because of their shared emphasis on mediation. And though Camus says frequently that in this respect "Christianity is Greek," his argument, as we have seen, often implies just the opposite--that the Greeks at best prefigure a notion that achieved its most complete realization only in Christianity (R, 190, 299). In Camus's second history his interpretation of the Greeks changes. First, he argues that the Greek insight into the nature of human life and its relation to the world was not improved or even equaled by Christianity but rather "shattered" by it. "The beautiful [bel] equilibrium between humanity and nature, man's consent to the world, which gives ancient thought its distinction and its refulgence, was first shattered for the benefit of history by Christianity" (R, 190; E, 594). In this context Camus means by history a divine providential account of the course of human life that begins with creation and culminates in the final judgement. "The Christians were the first to consider human life and the course of events as a history that is unfolding from a beginning toward an end, in the course of which man achieves his salvation or earns his punishment" (R, 189; E, 594). The Greeks did not understand history in this way. "The Greeks imagined the history of the world as cyclical" (R, 190). The idea that history is cyclical may be no less abstract than the idea that it moves in a "straight line," and it might not even be Greek. Nonetheless, Camus's reason for using the distinction is clear.
enough. He wants to distinguish between ancient attempts to find meaning in history that emphasize recurrent forms and patterns and Christian and modern accounts of history in which the course of events is understood to be "strictly unique" and in which that uniqueness is carried to its final term in the notion of an absolutely unprecedented apocalyptic kingdom (R, 189).

This notion of providential history is one way that Christianity "breaks" with the Greeks (R, 190). But perhaps the more fundamental break lies in the fact that Christianity "empties the world of its substance," which would seem to be the necessary condition for all apocalyptic notions of the end of history in which that substance will finally be regained and perfection achieved. If this is so then the primary problem with the account is dedivinization, to use Voegelin's term, the radical separation of God and world that is inherent in the Christian distinction between transcendence and immanence. Indeed, Voegelin himself argues that the defining feature of Christian dedivinization is its apocalyptic aspiration. "By dedivinization shall be meant the historical process in which the culture of polytheism died from experiential atrophy, and human existence in society became reordered through the experience of man's destination, by the grace of the world-transcendent God, toward eternal life in beatific vision." Of course, for Voegelin this achievement is one of Christianity's chief strengths. It successfully differentiates the human desire for perfection or completion while at the same time accepting the "conditio humana without chiliastic fancies." And as such it is the antithesis of all modern revolutionary expectations of a transformation of the temporal order into a lasting and final state of perfection.

Now Camus argues that this phenomenon is not Greek. The Greeks had gods, and they experienced transcendence, but they did not understand reality to be divided between transcendence and immanence in the Christian sense. As Camus writes, for the Greeks "there were not gods on one side and human beings on the other, but a series of degrees leading from one to the other" (R, 28; E, 439). Whatever these degrees might be, they are clearly not mediators in the Christian sense. They indicate a continuity of being ranging from the human to the divine that is characterized by differences but in which these differences are never conceived as absolute. Human beings are never without a relation to the divine and the divine is never separated absolutely from human beings. And this has very obvious and important implications for the Christian notion of mediation also. If the radical separation of God and
world that Camus finds in Christianity is wrong and abstract to begin with, then the Christian attempt to "diminish the distance" between God and world by means of the mediating work of Jesus is not a true solution at all, but merely the continuation of the confusions and distortions of dedivinization at an even greater level of abstraction. Moreover, the falseness of a solution of this type is always in danger of being exposed as such without any comparable clarity being achieved regarding the original misconception from which it derives its meaning. In that case what will occur is a proliferation of equally "true" solutions to the original "false" problem, that is to say, equally true attempts to redivinize a cosmos that was never truly dedivinized in the first place. Within the limits of Camus's second history this might almost stand as a definition of the nature of modernity. In modernity the exclusivity and finality of divine presence that Christianity had claimed for itself has been superceded by other, more comprehensive claims to finality (totalitarianism), and by more aggressive and violent means of achieving it (terrorism). In this century we have witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of mediators--regimes, ideologies, personalities--all setting themselves up as indispensable to human salvation, and all holding out the promise of an apocalyptic kingdom, the meaning of and the path to which are known only to the mediators themselves. In this interpretation, mediation, whether in its Christian or modern form, is all of a piece; and its effects are anything but salutary for human life. Indeed, Camus says that such accounts are closely related to what we now know as terrorism, that is, the imposition of "an interminable subjectivity...on others as objectivity," and the physical and psychological forms of torture necessary in order to make that subjectivity compelling (R, 224, 243, 239).

III

In a Notebook entry written just a few years prior to the publication of The Rebel, Camus wrote: "If, to outgrow nihilism, one must return to Christianity, one may well follow the impulse and outgrow Christianity in Hellenism" (N II, 183). I believe this was Camus's aim in writing The Rebel, though as we have seen he did not quite manage to pull it off. Why he hesitated is difficult to say. From the standpoint of Camus's second history, there is nothing to choose between the immanentized eschatologies of modernity and the transcendent eschatology of Christianity. Indeed, according to that history, the immanentization argument itself, which is the center piece of his first history and a commonplace in contemporary critiques of modernity, fails
to explain the true nature of modern metaphysical rebellion. The reason it fails is that it concedes
a type of moral seriousness to the apocalyptic soul that Camus, in his best psychological
analyses, argues is precisely what such a soul lacks. As Camus says so clearly in the opening
pages of *The Rebel*, the metaphysical rebel's refusal to accept "the suffering imposed by a
limited condition" is a type of madness, simply, and the end toward which he aspires - "absolute
destruction" or "the dark exaltation in which heaven and earth are annihilated" - is antithetical to
the true aims of rebellion (R, 7). In this interpretation, a human being who has such excessive
desires and who acts on them is simply not the same type of human being as the one who does
not, and who understands that rebellion against suffering and evil can only ever be limited in
scope and hence measured.

Though Camus's "Greek" assessment of modernity and the modern metaphysical rebel is not a
solution to anything, particularly not to the rebel's psychological troubles understood on their
own terms, it does have the advantage of describing clearly and soberly a pathology in the
human soul that we would do well to avoid. Unlike the immanentization argument, which even
in its most critical, Christian form leaves the real sickness untouched, this assessment at least
reveals a willingness to call the disease by its proper name. That seems like a good place to begin
for a clear-sighted analysis of the nature of modernity.

Notes

1. Camus repeats more or less the dialectical form of the Christian account in the following lines:
"The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the
divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the
agony of death. This is the explanation of the Lama Sabactani and the heart-rending doubt of
Christ in agony. The agony would have been mild if it had been alleviated by hopes of eternity.
For God to be a man, he must despair" (R, 33).

2. Martin Buber was very favourably impressed by *The Rebel*. However, in a letter to Camus
regarding its publication in Hebrew, he objected to Camus's interpretation of Judaism on
precisely this point. "There is only one phrase in the book that I find unjust, but it does bother me
exceptionally. It is on page 370 where you speak of the 'ciel implacable' of the Old Testament.
That is absolutely incorrect. The divine words 'I dwell on high, in holiness; yet with the contrite
and lowly in spirit (Isaiah 57:15) are not an exception; they are the very substance of this world.'
In other words, dedivinization is not a Jewish problem, at least not in the sense that it is in
Christianity. Camus's response was conciliatory: "I readily admit that the sentence that gave you
pause deserves numerous nuances, and I would have no objection to its being modified. That is
the draw back of enterprises that presume to sum up what cannot be summed up. But my main
effort was directed at the basic idea, even at the risk of obscurities and injustices. At any rate, I
shall gratefully accept any critique that points these injustices out to me and permits me to rectify
them." Martin Buber, The Letters of Martin Buber, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul
Mendes-Flor, translated by Richard and Clara Winston and Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken

3. These extreme formulations occur in Camus's discussion of the nature of art. What is odd
about this is that it is precisely when Camus is practicing his art, namely, when he is writing
novels and short stories, that this very modern ambition is least apparent in his work. In any
event, contrast what Camus here says about the nature of art with the much more realistic and
unsentimental account offered by Iris Murdoch: "[Literature and painting] show us the absolute
pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is training
in the love of virtue... This form often seems mysterious to us because it resists the easy patterns
of the fantasy, whereas there is nothing mysterious about the forms of bad art since they are the
recognizable and familiar rat-runs of selfish day-dream. Good art shows us how difficult it is to
be objective by showing us how differently the world looks to an objective vision." Iris

4. Two remarks will serve as examples: "The only thing that gives meaning to human protest is
the idea of a personal god who has created, and is therefore responsible for, everything" (R, 28).
"The enormous number of sects among the second-generation Gnostics indicates how desperate
and diversifed was the attempt on the part of Greek thought to make the Christian universe more
accessible and to remove the motives for a rebellion that Hellenism considered the worst of all evils" (R, 33).

5. The passage Camus refers to here as evidence of this view is taken from Aristotle's Problems,
17, 3: "If, then, there is a circle, and a circle has neither beginning nor end, men would not be
'before' because they are nearer the beginning, nor should we be 'before' them, nor they 'before'
by W. S. Hett, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 367. Camus first refers to this
passage in his M.A. thesis, Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, Essais, 1226. The
statement is conditional and speculative at best, and does not appear to be a doctrine about the
nature of history or about whether the cosmos is eternal or created.


7. Ibid., 109.

8. Ibid., 119-20. Voegelin's standard argument is that modern revolutionary accounts are
essentially Christian heresies in which true "Christian transcendental fulfillment becomes
immanentized."

9. Camus describes the ancient Greek account as a type of pantheism, which he distinguishes
from both the "vertical" transcendence of Christianity and the modern notion, most clearly
expressed in Hegel, of an immanent unfolding of the spirit in "the evolution of the world" (R, 142). One of the most common ways that Camus himself expresses the meaning of this pantheism is by associating it with our experience of "beauty," which he claims "carries the promise" of "a living transcendence" (R, 276, 258). In terms of its content, Camus claims that the experience of beauty increases our attachment to this "mortal world" while at the same time moving us to overcome or transcend its worst "injustices" or evils (R, 276). As such it is perhaps a better, more fitting way to describe our experience of the divinity that pervades all things. Cf. also Camus's essays "Helen's Exile" and "The Desert" (LCE, 93-105; 148-153).

10. This is more or less Nietzsche's assessment of modernity in Twilight of the Idols, "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth." If there is no "other world" then there is no "this world" either. The problem is a false one. Or as Nietzsche puts it: "We have abolished the real world: what world is left? the apparent world perhaps? ... But no! with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!" Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 50-1.

11. At the end of his discussion of historical rebellion Camus describes this phenomenon by means of the myth of Prometheus. "Prometheus, in his turn, becomes a master who first teaches and then commands. Men doubt that they can safely attack the city of light and are even uncertain whether the city exists. They must be saved from themselves. The hero tells them that he, and he alone, knows the city. Those who doubt his word will be thrown into the desert, chained to a rock, offered to the vultures. The others will march henceforth in darkness, behind the pensive and solitary master. Prometheus alone has become god and reigns over the solitude of men" (R, 245). Camus makes it clear that this new, modern Prometheus is not the "real, the eternal Prometheus" (R, 245). Yet the use of the myth in this context is still strange, because in his earlier discussion of Prometheus, Camus claims that such ambitions are entirely foreign to the myth's teaching. They are not, however, foreign to the ambitions of Christianity as Camus describes it in the preceding discussion. Indeed, here Prometheus appears to be not Greek at all, but a slightly more aggressive Christ, similar to the one we encounter in John's apocalypse.