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Totalitarianism

led by Dr. Flagg Taylor

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Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government (1953)

HANNAH ARENDT

I

The following considerations have grown out of a study of the origins, the elements and the functioning of that novel form of government and domination which we have come to call totalitarian. Wherever it rose to power, it developed entirely new political institutions and destroyed all social, legal, and political traditions of the country. No matter what the specifically national tradition or the particular spiritual source of its ideology, totalitarian government always transformed classes into masses, supplanted the party system, not by one-party dictatorships, but by a mass movement, shifted the center of power from the army to the police, and established a foreign policy openly directed toward world domination. Present totalitarian governments have developed from one-party systems; whenever these became truly totalitarian, they started to operate according to a system of values so radically different from all others, that none of our traditional legal, moral, or common-sense utilitarian categories could any longer help us to come to terms with, or judge, or predict its course of action.

If it is true that the elements of totalitarianism can be found by retracing the history and analyzing the political implications of what we usually call the crisis of our century, then the conclusion is unavoidable that this crisis is no mere threat from the outside, no mere result of some aggressive foreign policy of either Germany or Russia, and that it will no more

disappear with the fall of Soviet Russia than it disappeared with the fall of Nazi Germany. It may even be that the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form—though not necessarily the cruelest—only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past.

It is in the line of such reflections to raise the question whether totalitarian government, born of this crisis and at the same time its clearest and only unequivocal symptom, is merely a make-shift arrangement, which borrows its methods of intimidation, its means of organization, and its instruments of violence from the well-known political arsenal of tyranny, despotism, and dictatorships, and owes its existence only to the deplorable, but perhaps accidental failure of the traditional political forces—liberal or conservative, national or socialist, republican or monarchist, authoritarian or democratic. Or whether, on the contrary, there is such a thing as the *nature* of totalitarian government, whether it has its own essence and can be compared with and defined like other forms of government such as Western thought has known and recognized since the times of ancient philosophy.

Questions of this sort have been out of fashion for a long time and for reasons which may have more than a little to do with those modern developments which eventually brought about a crisis of Western politics no less than of Western political thought. More specifically, such questions have been thought superfluous, if not meaningless, ever since the social sciences established their rule over the whole field of politics and history. Interesting in this development, which easily can be traced back to Marx, was that sociology from its beginnings showed a marked tendency to explain political institutions and historical developments in terms of psychological types; all the well-known clichés of the lower middle classes, the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia have already that particular tinge of typification which shows itself openly in categories such as "the authoritarian personality." More recently, with the growing disappointment in the strictly Marxist explanation of history, psychology itself with its new Freudian concepts of superego, father-image, and oedipus complex, has invaded the social sciences and continues to provide them with their chief tools of "evaluation" to such an extent that it has become difficult to tell the two sciences from each other.

This new-fangled mixture of sociology and psychology is no accident. Both sciences have their origin in a liberalism that viewed politics (and

more or less all human affairs) under the dual category of society and individual. Men became mere parts of a society that conditioned or determined the individuals, as the whole determines its parts. In this sense, sociology and psychology have always been two sides of the same medal, the one dealing with the functioning of the whole (society), the other with the functioning of the parts (individuals). The trouble came when psychology, notwithstanding its respect for society, discovered that even these individuals, whose whole interior life was supposed to be conditioned by, or to react against, social circumstances, possess a "soul." But we have souls only as long as we are more than mere members of society where this psychological side of our being has always created disturbances. Manners and conventions, all public morals and mores help us to control our souls so that we can function on a merely social level. Individual psychology, since it looked on man as though he were nothing but an individual part of society, has developed into a science which deals mostly with abnormal behavior patterns: all "psychological" attitudes become abnormal when they occur in society because they have been stripped of the privacy in which alone a man's soul can function "normally." Individual psychology became fashionable wherever customs and conventions, the whole texture of morality which is the lifeblood of society, lost their authority. The modern individual is the surviving member of a society which no longer exists; it is a part that lost its place in the whole. In this situation, the psychological sciences have become increasingly social-minded and direct their greatest efforts toward the re-adjustment of isolated individuals. The trouble is that society as a whole, that is, as something which is greater than the sum total of its parts, no longer exists. The best demonstration of this is that the social sciences can conceive of society now only in terms of individual behavior patterns, which they indiscriminately apply to collective bodies where such behavior never occurs.

The great merit of this confusion is that it somehow has awakened us to the fact that political bodies, to quote a long-forgotten remark of Plato, do not spring from oak and rock (Republic 8.544d). Yet, they do not spring from within our particular and individual selves either. The old Roman distinction between *res publica* and *res privata* is still valid. Political forms of organization concern matters which are of equal concern to each of us because they occur *between us.* Our question whether there is such a thing as the nature of totalitarian domination means actually

whether the entirely new and unprecedented forms of totalitarian organization and course of action rest on one of the few basic experiences which men can make whenever they live together, and are concerned with public affairs. If there is a basic experience which finds its political expression in totalitarian domination, then, in view of the novelty of the totalitarian form of government, this must be an experience which, for whatever reason, has never before served *as* the foundation of a body politic and whose general mood—although it may be familiar in every other respect—never before has pervaded, and directed the handling of, public affairs.

If we consider this in terms of the history of ideas, it seems extremely unlikely. For the forms of government under which men live have been very few; they were discovered early, classified by the Greeks, and have proved extraordinarily long-lived. If we apply these findings, whose fundamental idea, despite many variations, did not change in the two and a half thousand years that separate Plato from Kant, we are tempted at once to interpret totalitarianism as some modern form of tyranny, that is a lawless government where power *is* wielded by one man. Arbitrary power, unrestricted by law, yielded in the interest of the ruler and hostile to the interests of the governed, on one hand, fear as the principle of action, namely fear of the people by the ruler and fear of the ruler by the people, on the other—these have been the hallmarks of tyranny throughout our tradition.

Instead of saying that totalitarian government is unprecedented, we could also say that it has exploded the very alternative on which all definitions of the essence of governments have been based in political philosophy, that is, the alternative between lawful and lawless government, between arbitrary and legitimate power. That lawful government and legitimate power, on one side, lawlessness and arbitrary power on the other, belonged together and were inseparable has never been questioned. Yet, totalitarian rule confronts us with a totally different kind of government. It defies, it is true, all positive laws, even to the extreme of defying those which it has itself established (as in the case of the Soviet Constitution of 1936, to quote only the most outstanding example) or which it did not care to abolish (as in the case of the Weimar Constitution which the Nazi government never revoked). But it operates neither without guidance of law nor is it arbitrary, for it claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or of History from which all positive laws always have been supposed to spring.

It is the monstrous, yet seemingly unanswerable claim of totalitarian rule that, far from being "lawless," it goes to the sources of authority from which positive laws received their ultimate legitimation, that far from being arbitrary it is more obedient to these suprahuman forces than any government ever was before, and that far from wielding its power in the interest of one man, it is quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital immediate interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature. Its defiance of positive laws claims to be a higher form of legitimacy which, since it is inspired by the sources themselves, can do away with petty legality. Totalitarian lawfulness pretends to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth—something which the legality of positive law admittedly could never attain. The discrepancy between legality and justice could never be bridged because the standards of right and wrong into which positive law translates its own source of authority—"natural law" governing the whole universe, or divine law revealed in human history or customs and traditions expressing the law common to the sentiments of all men—are necessarily general and must be valid for a countless and unpredictable number of cases, so that each concrete individual case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it.

Totalitarian lawfulness, defying legality and pretending to establish the direct reign of justice on earth, executes the law of History or of Nature without translating it into standards of right and wrong for individual behavior. It applies the law directly to mankind without bothering with the behavior of men. The law of Nature or the law of History, if properly executed, is expected to produce mankind as its end product; and this expectation lies behind the claim to global rule of all totalitarian governments. Totalitarian policy claims to transform the human species into an active unfailing carrier of a law to which human beings otherwise would only passively and reluctantly be subjected. If it is true that the link between totalitarian countries and the civilized world was broken through the monstrous crimes of totalitarian regimes, it is also true that this criminality was not due to simple aggressiveness, ruthlessness, warfare and treachery, but to a conscious break of that *consensus iuris* which, according to Cicero, constitutes a "people," and which, as international law, in modern times has constituted the civilized world insofar as it remains the foundation-stone of international relations even under the conditions of

war. Both moral judgment and legal punishment presuppose this basic consent; the criminal can be judged justly only because he takes part in the *consensus iuris,* and even the revealed law of God can function among men only when they listen and consent to it.

At this point the fundamental difference between the totalitarian and all other concepts of law comes to light. Totalitarian policy does not replace one set of laws with another, does not establish its own *consensus iuris,* does not create, by one revolution, a new form of legality. Its defiance of all, even its own positive laws, implies that it believes it can do without any *consensus iuris* whatever, and still not resign itself to the tyrannical state of lawlessness, arbitrariness, and fear. It can do without the *consensus iuris* because it promises to release the fulfillment of law from all action and will of man; and it promises justice on earth because it claims to make mankind itself the embodiment of the law.

This identification of man and law, which seems to cancel the discrepancy between legality and justice that has plagued legal thought since ancient times, has nothing in common with the *lumen naturale* or the voice of conscience, by which Nature or Divinity as the sources of authority for the *ius naturale* or the historically revealed commands of God, are supposed to announce their authority in man himself. This never made man a walking embodiment of the law, but on the contrary remained distinct from him as the authority which demanded consent and obedience. Nature or Divinity as the source of authority for positive laws are thought of as permanent and eternal; positive laws were changing and changeable according to circumstances, but they possessed a relative permanence as compared with the much more rapidly changing actions of men; and they derived this permanence from the eternal presence of their source of authority. Positive laws, therefore, are primarily designed to function as stabilizing factors for the ever changing movements of men.

In the interpretation of totalitarianism, all laws have become *laws of movement.* When the Nazis talked about the law of Nature or when the Bolsheviks talk about the law of History, neither Nature nor History is any longer the stabilizing source of authority for the actions of mortal men; they are movements in themselves. Underlying the Nazis' belief in race laws as the expression of the law of Nature in man, is Darwin's idea of man as the product of a natural development which does not necessarily stop with the present species of human beings, just as under the Bol-

sheviks' belief in class struggle *as* the expression of the law of History lies Marx's notion of society as the product of a gigantic historical movement which races according to its own law of motion to the end of historical times when it will abolish itself.

The difference between Marx's historical and Darwin's naturalistic approaches has frequently been pointed out, usually and rightly in favor of Marx. This has led us to forget the great and positive interest Marx took in Darwin's theories; Engels could not think of a greater compliment to Marx's scholarly achievements than to call him the "Darwin of history." If one considers, not the actual achievement, but the basic philosophies of both men, it turns out that ultimately the movement of History and the movement of Nature are one and the same. Darwin's introduction of the concept of development into nature, his insistence that, at least in the field of biology, natural movement is not circular but unilinear, moving in an infinitely progressing direction, means in fact that nature is, as it were, being swept into history, that natural life is considered to be historical. The "natural" law of the survival of the fittest is just as much a historical law and could be used as such by racism as Marx's law of the survival of the most progressive class. Marx's class struggle, on the other hand, as the driving force of history is only the outward expression of the development of productive forces which in turn have their origin in the labor *force* of men. Labor, according to Marx, is not a historical but a natural-biological "force," namely man's "metabolism with nature" by which he conserves his individual life and reproduces the species. Engels saw the affinity between the basic convictions of the two men very clearly because he understood the decisive role which the concept of development played in both theories. The tremendous intellectual change which took place in the middle of the last century consisted in the refusal to view or accept anything "as it is" and in the consistent interpretation of everything as being only a stage of some further development. Whether the driving force of this development was called nature or history is relatively secondary.

In these theories, the term "law" itself changed its meaning: from expressing the framework of stability within which human actions and motions can take place, it became the expression of the motion itself.

II

By lawful government we understand a body politic in which positive laws are needed to translate and realize the immutable *ius naturale* or the eternal commandments of God into standards of right and wrong. Only in these standards, in the body of positive laws of each country, do the *ius naturale* or the Commandments of God achieve their political reality. In the body politic of totalitarian government, this place of positive laws is taken by total terror, which is designed to translate into reality the law of movement of History or Nature. Just as positive laws, though they define transgressions, are independent of them—the absence of crimes in any society does not render laws superfluous but, on the contrary, signifies their most perfect rule—so terror in totalitarian government has ceased to be a mere means for the suppression of opposition, though it is also used for such purposes. Terror becomes total when it becomes independent of all opposition; it rules supreme when nobody any longer stands in its way. If lawfulness is the essence of nontyrannical government and lawlessness is the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination.

Terror is the realization of the law of movement; its chief aim is to make it possible for the force of Nature or of History to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action. As such, terror seeks to "stabilize" men in order to liberate the forces of Nature or History. It is this movement which singles out the foes of mankind against whom terror is let loose, and no free action of either opposition or sympathy can be permitted to interfere with the elimination of the "objective enemy" of History or Nature, of the class or the race. Guilt and innocence become senseless notions; "guilty" is he who stands in the way of the natural or historical process which has passed judgment over "inferior races," over individuals "unfit to live," over "dying classes and decadent peoples." Terror executes these judgments, and before its court, all concerned are subjectively innocent: the murdered because they did nothing against the system, and the murderers because they do not really murder but execute a death sentence pronounced by some higher tribunal. The rulers themselves do not claim to be just or wise, but only to execute historical or natural laws; they do not apply laws, but execute a

movement in accordance with its inherent law. Terror is lawfulness, if law is the law of the movement of some suprahuman force, Nature or History.

Terror as the execution of a law of movement whose ultimate goal is not the welfare of men or the interest of one man but the fabrication of mankind, eliminates individuals for the sake of the species, sacrifices the "parts" for the sake of the "whole." The suprahuman force of Nature or History has its own beginning and its own end, so that it can be hindered only by the new beginning and the individual end which the life of each man actually is.

Positive laws in constitutional government are designed to erect boundaries and establish channels of communication between men whose community is continually endangered by the new men born into it. With each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world, a new world has potentially come into being. The stability of the laws corresponds to the constant motion of all human affairs, a motion which can never end as long as men are born and die. The laws hedge in each new beginning and at the same time assure its freedom of movement, the potentiality of something entirely new and unpredictable; the boundaries of positive laws are for the political existence of man what memory is for his historical existence: they guarantee the pre-existence of a common world, the reality of some continuity which transcends the individual life span of each generation, absorbs all new origins, and is nourished by them.

Total terror is so easily mistaken for a symptom of tyrannical government because totalitarian government in its initial stages must behave like a tyranny and raze the boundaries of man-made law. But total terror leaves no arbitrary lawlessness behind it and does not rage for the sake of some arbitrary will or for the sake of despotic power of one man against all, least of all for the sake of a war of all against all. It substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions. To abolish the fences of laws between men—as tyranny does—means to take away man's liberties and destroy freedom as a living political reality; for the space between men as it is hedged in by laws, is the living space of freedom. Total terror uses this old instrument of tyranny but destroys at the same time also the lawless, fenceless wilderness of fear and suspicion which tyranny leaves behind. This desert, to be sure, is no longer a living

space of freedom, but it still provides some room for the fear-guided movements and suspicion-ridden actions of its inhabitants.

By pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them; compared to the condition within its iron band, even the desert of tyranny, insofar as it is still some kind of space, appears like a guarantee of freedom. Totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it, at least to our limited knowledge, succeed in eradicating the love for freedom from the hearts of man. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.

Total terror, the essence of totalitarian government, exists neither for nor against men. It is supposed to provide the forces of Nature or History with an incomparable instrument to accelerate their movement. This movement, proceeding according to its own law, cannot in the long run be hindered; eventually its force will always prove more powerful than the most powerful forces engendered by the actions and the will of men. But it can be slowed down and is slowed down almost inevitably by the freedom of man, which even totalitarian rulers cannot deny, for this freedom—irrelevant and arbitrary as they may deem it—is identical with the fact that men are being born and that therefore each of them is a new beginning, begins, in a sense, the world anew. From the totalitarian point of view, the fact that men are born and die can be only regarded as an annoying interference with higher forces. Terror, therefore, as the obedient servant of natural or historical movement has to eliminate from the process not only freedom in any specific sense, but the very source of freedom which is given with the fact of the birth of man and resides in his capacity to make a new beginning. In the iron band of terror, which destroys the plurality of men and makes out of many the One who unfailingly will act as though he himself were part of the course of History or Nature, a device has been found not only to liberate the historical and natural forces, but to accelerate them to a speed they never would reach if left to themselves. Practically speaking, this means that terror executes on the spot the death sentences which Nature is supposed to have pronounced on races or individuals who are "unfit to live," or History on "dying classes," without waiting for the slower and less efficient processes of Nature or History themselves.

In this concept, where the essence of government itself has become motion, a very old problem of political thought seems to have found a

solution similar to the one already noted for the discrepancy between legality and justice. If the essence of government is defined as lawfulness, and if it is understood that laws are the stabilizing forces in the public affairs of men (as indeed it always has been since Plato invoked Zeus, the God of the boundaries, in his Laws) then the problem of movement of the body politic and the actions of its citizens arises. Lawfulness sets limitations to actions, but does not inspire them; the greatness, but also the perplexity of laws in free societies is that they only tell what one should not, but never what one should do. The necessary movement of a body politic can never be found in its essence if only because this essence—again since Plato—has always been defined with a view to its permanence. Duration seemed one of the surest yardsticks for the goodness of a government. It is still, for Montesquieu, the supreme proof for the badness of tyranny that only tyrannies are liable to be destroyed from within, to decline by themselves, whereas all other governments are destroyed through exterior circumstances. Therefore what the definition of governments always needed was what Montesquieu called a "principle of action" which, different in each form of government, would inspire government and citizens alike in their public activity and serve as a criterion beyond the merely negative yardstick of lawfulness, for judging all action in public affairs. Such guiding principles and criteria of action are, according to Montesquieu, honor in a monarchy, virtue in a republic, and fear in a tyranny.

In a perfect totalitarian government, where all men have become One Man, where all action aims at the acceleration of the movement of Nature or History, where every single act is the execution of a death sentence which Nature or History has already pronounced, that is, under conditions where terror can be completely relied upon to keep the movement in constant motion, no principle of action separate from its essence would be needed at all. Yet as long as totalitarian rule has not conquered the earth and with the iron band of terror made each single man a part of one mankind, terror in its double function as essence of government and principle, not of action, but of motion cannot be fully realized. Just as lawfulness in constitutional government is insufficient to inspire and guide men's actions, so terror in totalitarian government is not sufficient to inspire and guide human behavior.

While under present conditions totalitarian domination still shares with other forms of government the need for a guide for the behavior of its citi-

zens in public affairs, it does not need and could not even use a principle of action strictly speaking, since it will eliminate precisely the capacity of man to act. Under conditions of total terror not even fear can any longer serve as an advisor of how to behave, because terror chooses its victims without reference to individual actions or thoughts, exclusively in accordance with the objective necessity of the natural or historical process. Under totalitarian conditions, fear probably is more widespread than ever before; but fear has lost its practical usefulness when actions guided by it can no longer help to avoid the dangers man fears. The same is true for sympathy or support of the regime; for total terror not only selects its victims according to objective standards; it chooses its executioners with as complete a disregard as possible for the candidate's conviction and sympathies. The consistent elimination of conviction as a motive for action has become a matter of record since the great purges in Soviet Russia and the satellite countries. The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any. The introduction of purely objective criteria into the selective system of the SS troops was Himmler's great organizational invention; he selected the candidates from photographs according to purely racial criteria. Nature itself decided, not only who was to be eliminated, but also who was to be trained as an executioner.

No guiding principle of behavior, taken itself from the realm of human action, such as virtue, honor, fear, is necessary or can be useful to set into motion a body politic which no longer uses terror as a means of intimidation, but whose essence is terror. In its stead, it has introduced an entirely new principle into public affairs that dispenses with human will to action altogether and appeals to the craving need for some insight into the law of movement according to which the terror functions and upon which, therefore, all private destinies depend.

The inhabitants of a totalitarian country are thrown into and caught in the process of Nature or History for the sake of accelerating its movement; as such, they can only be executioners or victims of its inherent law. The process may decide that those who today eliminate races and individuals or the members of dying classes and decadent peoples are tomorrow those who must be sacrificed. What totalitarian rule needs to guide the behavior of its subjects is a *preparation* to fit each of them equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation, the substitute for a principle of action, is the ideology.

III

Ideologies—isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise—are a very recent phenomenon and, for many decades, this played a negligible role in political life. Only with the wisdom of hindsight can we discover in them certain elements which have made them so disturbingly useful for totalitarian rule. Not before Hitler and Stalin were the great political potentialities of the ideologies discovered.

Ideologies are known for their scientific character: they combine the scientific approach with results of philosophical relevance and pretend to be scientific philosophy. The word "ideology" seems to imply that an idea can become the subject matter of a science just as animals are the subject matter of zoology, and that the suffix *-logy* in ideology, as in zoology, indicates nothing but the *logoi,* the scientific statements made on it. If this were true; an ideology would indeed be a pseudoscience and a pseudophilosophy, transgressing at the same time the limitations of science and the limitations of philosophy. Deism, for example, would then be the ideology which treats the *idea* of God, with which philosophy is concerned, in the scientific manner of theology for which God is a revealed reality. (A theology which is not based on revelation as a given reality but treats God as an idea would be as mad as a zoology which is no longer sure of the physical, tangible existence of animals.) Yet we know that this is only part of the truth. Deism, though it denies divine revelation, does not simply make "scientific" statements on a God which is only an "idea," but uses the idea of God in order to explain the course of the world. The "ideas" of isms—race in racism, God in deism, etc.—never form the subject matter of the ideologies and the suffix *-logy* never indicates simply a body of "scientific" statements.

An ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the *logic of an idea.* Its subject matter is history to which the "idea" is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that *is,* but the unfolding of a *process* which is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of

the present, the uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas.

Ideologies are never interested in the miracle of being. They are historical, concerned with becoming and perishing, with the rise and fall of cultures, even if they try to explain history by some "law of nature." The word "race" in racism does not signify any genuine curiosity about the human races as a field for scientific exploration, but is the "idea" by which the movement of history is explained as one consistent process.

The "idea" of an ideology is neither the eternal essence grasped by the eyes of the mind nor the regulator of reason—as it was from Plato to Kant—but has become an instrument of explanation. To an ideology, history does not appear in the *light* of an idea (which would imply that history is seen *sub specie* of some ideal eternity which itself is beyond historical motion) but as something which can be *calculated* by it. What fits the "idea" into this new role is its own "logic," that is a movement which is the consequence of the "idea" itself and needs no outside factor to set it into motion. Racism is the belief that there is a motion inherent in the very "idea" of race, just as deism is the belief that a motion is inherent in the very notion of God.

The movement of history and the logical process of this notion are supposed to correspond to each other, so that whatever happens, happens according to the logic of one "idea." However, the only possible movement in the realm of logic is the process of deduction from a premise. Dialectical logic, with its process from thesis through antithesis to synthesis which in turn becomes the thesis of the next dialectical movement is not different in principle, once an ideology gets hold of it; the first thesis becomes the premise and its advantage for ideological explanation is that this dialectical device can explain away factual contradictions as stages of one identical, consistent movement.

As soon as logic as a *movement* of thought—and not as a necessary control of thinking—is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a *premise.* Ideological world explanations performed this operation long before it became so eminently fruitful for totalitarian reasoning. The purely negative coercion of logic, the prohibition of contradictions, became "productive" so that a whole line of thought could be initiated, and forced upon the mind, by drawing conclusions in the manner of mere argumentation. This argumentative process could be interrupted neither

by a new idea (which would have been another premise with a different set of consequences) nor by a new experience. Ideologies always assume that one idea is sufficient to explain everything in the development from the premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction. The danger in exchanging the necessary insecurity of philosophical thought for the total explanation of an ideology and its *Weltanschauung*, is not even so much the risk of falling for some usually vulgar, always uncritical assumption as of exchanging the freedom inherent in man's capacity to think for the straightjacket of logic with which man can force himself almost as violently as he is forced by some outside power.

The transformation of an idea into a premise and the use of the logic of deduction as the only demonstration for truth, is certainly only one of the totalitarian elements in ideologies. Another is obviously the claim of all *Weltanschauungen* to offer total explanations of everything, mainly, of course, of past, present, and future. And the emancipation from reality this method always implies, since it pretends to know beforehand everything that experience may still have in store, might, psychologically speaking, be even more important. Yet, we insisted on this peculiar logicality of ideologies because the true totalitarian rulers (Hitler and Stalin, not their forerunners) used it more than any other element when they converted ideologies—racism and the premise of the law of Nature, or dialectical materialism and the premise of the law of History—into foundation stones for the new totalitarian body politic.

The device both totalitarian rulers used to transform their respective ideologies into weapons with which each of their subjects would force himself into step with the terror movement was deceptively simple and inconspicuous: they took them dead seriously, took pride the one in his supreme gift for "ice cold reasoning" (Hitler) and the other in the "mercilessness of his dialectics," and proceeded to drive ideological implications into extremes of logical consistency which, to the onlooker, looked preposterously "primitive" and absurd: a "dying class" consisted of people condemned to death; races that are "unfit to live" were to be exterminated. Whoever agreed that there are such things as "dying classes" and did not draw the consequence of killing their members, or that the right to live had something to do with race and did not draw the consequence of killing "unfit races," was plainly either stupid or a coward. This stringent

logicality as a guide to action permeates the whole structure of totalitarian movements and governments. It is exclusively the work of Hitler and Stalin who, although they did not add a single new thought to the ideas and propaganda slogans of their movements, for this reason alone must be considered ideologists of the greatest importance.

What distinguished these new totalitarian ideologists from their predecessors was that it was no longer primarily the "idea" of the ideology—the struggle of classes and the exploitation of the workers or the struggle of races and the care for Germanic peoples—which appealed to them, but the logical process which could be developed from it. According to Stalin, neither the idea nor the oratory but "the irresistible force of logic thoroughly overpowered (Lenin's) audience." The power, which Marx thought was born when the idea seized the masses was discovered to reside, not in the idea itself, but in its logical process which "like a mighty tentacle seizes you on all sides as in a vise and from whose grip you are powerless to tear yourself away; you must either surrender or make up your mind to utter defeat."* Only when the realization of the ideological aims, the classless society or the master race, were at stake, could this force show itself. In the process of realization, the original substance upon which the ideologies based themselves as long as they had to appeal to the masses—the exploitation of the workers or the national aspirations of Germany—is gradually lost, devoured as it were by the process itself: in perfect accordance with "ice cold reasoning" and the "irresistible force of logic," the workers lost under Bolshevik rule even those rights they had been granted under Tsarist oppression and the German people suffered a kind of warfare which did not pay the slightest regard to the minimum requirements for survival of the German nation. It is in the nature of ideological politics—and is not simply a betrayal committed for the sake of self-interest or lust for power—that the real content of the ideology (the working class or the Germanic peoples), which originally had brought about the "idea" (the struggle of classes as the law of History or the struggle of races as the law of Nature), is devoured by the logic with which the "idea" is carried out.

The preparation of victims and executioners which totalitarianism requires in place of Montesquieu's principle of action is not the ideology

* Stalin's speech of January 28, 1924; quoted from Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. I (Moscow, 1947), 33.

itself—racism or dialectical materialism—but its inherent logicality. The most persuasive argument in this respect, an argument of which Hitler, like Stalin, was very fond, is: you can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet. Here, the coercive force of logicality seems to have its source; it springs from our fear of contradicting ourselves. To the extent that the Bolshevik purge succeeds in making its victims confess to crimes they never committed, it relies chiefly on this basic fear and argues as follows: we are all agreed on the premise that History is a struggle of classes and on the role of the Party in its conduct. You know therefore that, historically speaking, the Party is always right (in the words of Trotsky: "We can only be right with and by the Party, for history has provided no other way of being in the right"). At this historical moment, that is in accordance with the law of History, certain crimes are due to be committed which the Party, knowing the law of History, must punish. For these crimes, the Party needs criminals; it may be that the Party, though knowing the crimes, does not quite know the criminals; more important than to be sure about the criminals is to punish the crimes, because without such punishment, History will not be advanced but may even be hindered in its course. You, therefore, either have committed the crimes or have been called by the Party to play the role of the criminal—in either case, you have objectively become an enemy of the Party. If you don't confess, you cease to help History through the Party, and have become a real enemy. The coercive force of the argument is: if you refuse, you contradict yourself and, through this contradiction, render your whole life meaningless; the A which you said dominates your whole life through the consequences of B and C which it logically engenders.

Totalitarian rulers rely on the compulsion with which we can compel ourselves, for the limited mobilization of people which even they still need; this inner compulsion is the tyranny of logicality against which nothing stands but the great capacity of men to start something new. The tyranny of logicality begins with the mind's submission to logic as a never-ending process, on which man relies in order to engender his thoughts. By this submission, he surrenders his inner freedom as he surrenders his freedom of movement when he bows down to an outward tyranny. Freedom as an inner capacity of man is identical with the capacity to begin, just as freedom as a political reality is identical with a space of movement between men. Over the beginning, no logic, no cogent deduction can

have any power, because its chain presupposes, in the form of a premise, the beginning. As terror is needed, lest with the birth of each new human being a new beginning arise and raise its voice in the world, so the self-coercive force of logicality is mobilized lest anybody ever start thinking—which as the freest and purest of all human activities is the very opposite of the compulsory process of deduction. Totalitarian government can be safe only to the extent that it can mobilize man's own will power in order to force him into that gigantic movement of History or Nature which supposedly uses mankind as its material and knows neither birth nor death.

The compulsion of total terror on one side, which, with its iron band, presses masses of isolated men together *and supports* them in a world which has become a wilderness for them, and the self-coercive force of logical deduction on the other, which prepares each individual in his lonely isolation against all others, correspond to each other and need each other in order to set the terror-ruled movement into motion and keep it moving. Just as terror, even in its pre-total, merely tyrannical form, ruins all relationships between men, so the self-compulsion of ideological thinking ruins all relationships with reality. The preparation has succeeded when people have lost contact with their fellow men as well as the reality around them; for together with these contacts, men lose the capacity of both experience and thought. The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist.

IV

The question we raised at the start of these considerations and to which we now return is what kind of basic experience in the living-together of men permeates a form of government whose essence is terror and whose principle of action is the logicality of ideological thinking. That such a combination was never used before in the varied forms of political domination is obvious. Still, the basic experience on which it rests must be human and known to men, insofar as even this most "original" of all political bodies has been devised by, and is somehow answering the needs of, men.

It has frequently been observed that terror can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against each other and that, therefore, one of the primary concerns of all tyrannical government is to bring this isolation about. Isolation may be the beginning of terror; it certainly is its most fertile ground; it always *is* its result. This isolation is, as it were, pretotalitarian; its hallmark is impotence, insofar as power always comes from men acting together, "acting in concert" (Burke); isolated men are powerless by definition.

Isolation and impotence, that is the fundamental inability to act at all, have always been characteristic of tyrannies. Political contacts between men are severed in tyrannical government and the human capacities for action and power are frustrated. But not all contacts between men are broken and not all human capacities destroyed. The whole sphere of private life with the capacities for experience, fabrication, and thought are left intact. We know that the iron band of total terror leaves no space for such private life and that the self-coercion of totalitarian logic destroys man's capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action.

What we call isolation in the political sphere is called loneliness in the sphere of social intercourse. Isolation and loneliness are not the same. I can be isolated—that is, in a situation in which I cannot act, because there is nobody who will act with me—without being lonely; and I can be lonely—that is, in a situation in which I as a person feel myself deserted by all human companionship—without being isolated. Isolation is that impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives, where they act together in the pursuit of a common concern, is destroyed. Yet isolation, though destructive of power and the capacity for action, not only leaves intact but is required for all so-called productive activities of men. Man, insofar as he is *homo faber,* tends to isolate himself with his work, that is, to leave temporarily the realm of politics. Fabrication *(poiesis,* the making of things), as distinguished from action *(praxis)* on one hand and sheer labor on the other, is always performed in a certain isolation from common concerns, no matter whether the result is a piece of craftsmanship or of art. In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary forms of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, are destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable. This can happen in a world whose chief values are dictated by labor,

that is where all human activities have been transformed into laboring. Under such conditions, only the sheer effort of labor, which is the effort to keep alive, is left, and the relationship with the world as a human artifice is broken. Isolated man, who lost his place in the political realm of action, is deserted by the world of things as well, if he is no longer recognized as *homo faber* but treated as an *animal laborans* whose necessary "metabolism with nature" *is* of concern to no one. Isolation then becomes loneliness. Tyranny based on isolation generally leaves the productive capacities of man intact; a tyranny over "laborers," however, as, for instance, the rule over slaves in antiquity, would automatically be a rule over lonely, not only isolated, men and tends to be totalitarian.

While isolation concerns only the political realm of life, loneliness concerns human life as a whole. Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man.

Loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government, and for ideology or logicality, the preparation of its executioners and victims, is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and have become acute with the rise of imperialism at the end of the last century and the break-down of political institutions and social traditions in our own time. To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all. Uprootedness can be the preliminary condition for superfluousness, just as isolation can (but must not) be the preliminary condition for loneliness. Taken in itself, without consideration of its recent historical causes and its new role in politics, loneliness is at the same time contrary to the basic requirements of the human condition *and* one of the fundamental experiences of every human life. Even the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our *common* sense which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense

data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous. Only because we have common sense, that is, only because not one man, but men in the plural, inhabit the earth, can we trust our immediate sensual experience. Yet, we have only to remind ourselves that one day we shall have to leave this common world which will go on as before and for whose continuity we are superfluous in order to realize loneliness, the experience of being abandoned by everything and everybody.

Loneliness is not solitude. Solitude requires being alone, whereas loneliness shows itself most sharply in company with others. Apart from a few stray remarks—usually framed in a paradoxical mood like Cato's statement (reported by Cicero, *De Re Publica,* 1.17): *numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset,* "never was he less alone than when he was alone," or never was he less lonely than when he was in solitude—it seems that Epictetus, the emancipated slave philosopher of Greek origin, was the first to distinguish between loneliness and solitude. His discovery, in a way, was accidental, his chief interest being neither solitude nor loneliness, but being alone (*monos*) in the sense of absolute independence. As Epictetus sees it (*Dissertationes,* bk. 3, ch. 13) the lonely man (*eremos*) finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed. The solitary man, on the contrary, is alone and therefore "can be together with himself" since men have the capacity of "talking with themselves." In solitude, in other words, I am "by myself," together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others. All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought. The problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other. For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people; and it is the great saving grace of companionship for solitary men that it makes them "whole" again, saves them from the dialogue of thought in which one remains always equivocal, restores the identity which makes them speak with the single voice of one unexchangeable person.

Solitude can become loneliness; this happens when all by myself I am deserted by my own self. Solitary men have always been in danger of lone-

liness, when they can no longer find the redeeming grace of companionship to save them from duality and equivocality and doubt. Historically, it seems as though this danger became sufficiently great to be noticed by others and recorded by history only in the nineteenth century. It showed itself clearly when philosophers, for whom alone solitude is a way of life and a condition of work, were no longer content with the fact that "philosophy is only for the few" and began to insist that nobody "understands" them. Characteristic in this respect is the anecdote reported from Hegel's deathbed which hardly could have been told of any great philosopher before him: "Nobody has understood me except one; and he also misunderstood." Conversely, there is always the chance that a lonely man finds himself and starts the thinking dialogue of solitude. This seems to have happened to Nietzsche in Sils Maria when he conceived of *Zarathustra.* In two poems ("Sils Maria" and "Aus hohen Bergen") he tells of the empty expectation and the yearning waiting of the lonely until suddenly *"um Mittag wars, da wurde Eins zu Zwei . . . Nun feiern wir, vereinten Siegs gewiss, / Das Fest der Feste: Freund Zarathustra kam, der Gast der Gäste!"* ("Noon was, when One became Two . . . Certain of united victory we celebrate the feast of feasts; friend Zarathustra came, the guest of guests.")

What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals. In this situation, man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts and that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all. Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time.

The only capacity of the human mind which needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely and which is as independent of experience as it is of thinking is the ability of logical reasoning whose premise is the self-evident. The elementary rules of cogent evidence, the truism that two and two equals four cannot be perverted even under the conditions of absolute loneliness. It is the only reliable "truth" human beings can fall back upon once they have lost the mutual guarantee, the common sense, men need in order to experience and live and know their way in a common world. But this "truth" is empty, or rather no truth at all, because it does not reveal anything. (To define consistency as truth as some modern logicians do means to deny the existence of truth.) Under the conditions of loneliness, therefore, the self-evident is no longer just a

means of the intellect and begins to be productive, to develop its own lines of "thought." That thought processes characterized by strict self-evident logicality, from which apparently there is no escape, have some connection with loneliness was once noticed by Luther (whose experiences in the phenomena of solitude and loneliness probably were second to no one's and who once dared to say that "there must be a God because man needs one being whom he can trust") in a little-known remark on the Bible text "it is not good that man should be alone": a lonely man, says Luther, "always deduces one thing from the other and thinks everything to the worst." (*"Ein solcher (sc. einsamer) Mensch folgert immer eins aus dem andern und denkt alles zum Argsten."* In: *Erbauliche Schriften,* "Warum die Einsamkeit zu fliehen?") The famous extremism of totalitarian movements, far from having anything to do with true radicalism, consists indeed in this "thinking everything to the worst," in this deducing process which always arrives at the worst possible conclusions.

What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the nontotalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever-growing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism drives and organizes the masses looks like a suicidal escape from this reality. The "ice cold reasoning" and the "mighty tentacle" of dialectics which "seizes you as in a vise" appear like a last support in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon. It is the inner coercion whose only content is the strict avoidance of contradictions that seems to confirm a man's identity outside all relationships with others. It fits him into the iron band of terror even when he is alone, and totalitarian domination tries never to leave him alone except in the extreme situation of solitary confinement. By destroying all space between men and pressing men against each other, even the productive potentialities of isolation are annihilated; by teaching and glorifying the logical reasoning of loneliness where man knows that he will be utterly lost if ever he lets go of the first premise from which the whole process is being started, even the slim chances that loneliness may be transformed into solitude and logic into thought are obliterated.

If it is true that tyranny bears the germs of its own destruction because it is based upon powerlessness which is the negation of man's political condition, then one is tempted to predict the downfall of totalitarian domi-

nation without outside interference, because it rests on the one human experience which is the negation of man's social condition. Yet, even if this analogy were valid—and there are reasons to doubt it—it would operate only after the full realization of totalitarian government, which is possible only after the conquest of the earth.

Apart from such considerations—which as predictions are of little avail and less consolation—there remains the fact that the crisis of our time and its central experience have brought forth an entirely new form of government which, as a potentiality and an ever-present danger, is only too likely to stay with us from now on, just as other forms of government which came about at different historical moments and rested on different fundamental experiences have stayed with mankind regardless of temporary defeats—monarchies and republics, tyrannies, dictatorships, and despotism.

But there remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only "message" which the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus* est—"that a beginning be made man was created" said Augustine. *(Civitas Dei, Book* 12, ch. 20) This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man.

11

The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism (1979)

CLAUDE LEFORT

The problem of totalitarianism has long occupied a central position in my thinking and requires, I believe, a new approach to politics. This term has enjoyed a rise in its fortunes recently, at least as applied to regimes described as "socialist." It is true that Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron and a few, very few others, including myself, made use of it twenty or twenty-five years ago, taking it in its widest sense, to describe its socialist as well as Fascist variants. Each of us was following his or her own course; for my part, I did not know the work of Hannah Arendt when, after devoting a number of studies to the critique of bureaucracy (the first being published in 1948), I began to work out a more clearly political conceptualization in an essay entitled "Totalitarianism without Stalin," which dates from 1956. To speak of totalitarianism in relation to the Soviet Union was regarded as scandalous at the time and continued to be so until fairly recently. Today the term surprises no one. I would even say that it has become worn out before becoming meaningful. What does it signify? It signifies a regime in which state violence is practiced on society as a whole, a system of generalized, detailed coercion—scarcely more than that. It is now becoming the foundation of a new kind of political thinking, a new interpretation of the history of modern societies or of history in general. So I am a little afraid of adding my voice to the concert of those known as "new philosophers." But I have regarded totalitarianism for too long as the major fact of our time, posing an enigma that calls for a reexamination of the genesis of political societies, to give into the fear that I might be following fashion.

Having referred to my earliest work on bureaucracy, I should also indicate or remind the reader that my thinking was carried out at first within the horizons of Marxism. In close collaboration with Castoriadis,* who had at an early stage identified the features of a new social formation in the USSR, I set out to demonstrate the class division that had grown up after the Russian Revolution and the specific character of a state with which the dominant class, the bureaucracy, had become interlocked. The bureaucracy did not find the basis of its power in private property, but collectively, interdependently, in its dependence on state power, the party-state, which possessed all the means of production. This bureaucratic stratum displayed a strength and stability that Trotskyist thought was incapable of grasping; for the Trotskyists continued to imagine that a mere caste, parasitical and transitory, had superimposed itself on a socialist infrastructure and they failed to realize that a new form of domination and exploitation had been established at the expense of the peasantry, the proletariat and the overwhelming majority of the population.

Comparing the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, I observed that the latter offered a remarkable contrast between the strength of its constitution as a class and the fragility of the position of its members, who were constantly threatened with annihilation, whatever their rank and authority, on account of their subjection to political power. The great Stalinist purges showed that the bureaucracy was ideally everything and the bureaucrats nothing; the periodic eviction of thousands or tens of thousands of bureaucrats, far from being contrary to the interests of the bureaucracy, seemed to me to be proof of its power, beyond the fate of individuals. I developed these analyses under the aegis of what seemed to me to be authentic Marxism, the Marxism of Marx, which I regarded as having been completely distorted in all the versions of so-called orthodox Marxism. This being the case, I firmly believed, at the time, in the role of the proletariat. It was, in my view, the privileged agent of history. I thought, in short, that the bureaucracy, although it had taken advantage of the modern conditions of industrial society, had been able to constitute itself and develop as a historical force only because the working class had

* Cornelius Castoriadis and LeFort together founded the Trostskyite splinter group called Socialisme ou Barbarie (1949–1966), dedicated to reviving the idea of real workers' self-government as true socialism.

been divided, opposed to itself, during its century-long struggles to organize and emancipate itself; because it had given rise to a dominant stratum, it had become alienated from itself in the figure of a Leader, a power that turned out to be an alien force working for its own gain. By virtue of a dialectic, whose resources we know only too well, I concluded that this alienation of the proletariat from itself, this ultimate form of alienation, was necessary, that the proletariat had to go through this experience at the end of which a bureaucracy separated itself off from it and turned against it, so that the need for an abolition of all social division, and not only of private property, would be fully affirmed. Thus the representation of a society delivered from division governed my thinking.

But there are two reasons, it now seems to me, which contradicted that Marxist perspective and prevented me from fully accepting a conception that reduced the creativity of history to that of the proletariat. These two reasons apparently belong to quite different orders. In the first place, at the very moment when I imagined an abolition of social division and found in the proletariat the true agent of history, I was reading Marx in a way which encouraged and facilitated questioning. In terms of my background, I am neither a sociologist nor a political scientist. My training is philosophical, and I acquired it, while still on the lycée benches, from Merleau-Ponty, a thinker who had a gift for breaking certainties, introducing complications where one sought simplification, who refused the distinction between the subject and the object, taught that the true questions were not to be exhausted in the answers, that they come not only from us, but are the sign of our interaction with the world, with others, with being itself. So drawn to, indeed enchanted by Marx, I nevertheless could not read him without satisfying the high standards laid down by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. I developed a relation to Marx's work in and through my questioning of it. No doubt what I found there responded to a desire within me whose origin I could not identify, but that is of little significance. The fact is that what attracted me in Marx was the ambiguity of his thinking and, more than that, his opposition to himself, the way in which his thought escapes from itself in the best of his works and from one work to another, the indetermination that undermined what was presented as a system, that undermined the commentary which he himself sometimes gave on his work in order to bring it together in the form of theses.

For instance, I very soon became aware of an opposition in Marx between the notions of continuity and discontinuity in history: the idea of an ineluctable movement governed by the growth of productive forces, moving from one mode of production to another, on the one hand, and the idea of a radical break between all precapitalist modes of production and modern capitalism, on the other; or in other words, an opposition between the idea of a dissolution of all restricted social relations and the idea of a force of conservation, of mechanisms of repetition which, even in capitalism, seemed to ensure the permanence of a structure. Similarly, I was very aware of the vacillation of an interpretation that sometimes was concerned solely to discover the material foundations of social life and its evolution, while at others revealed the full weight of the social imaginary, the function of the phantoms that haunt the present or the function of fetishism—an interpretation that was sometimes Darwinian, sometimes Shakespearean in inspiration. In short, while being drawn to the theory of the proletariat or of a classless society, I was no less attracted by the elusive elements in Marx's work. Thus, unknown to myself, the ideal of a complete determination of social reality, of the essence of history, was in contradiction with the discovery of an indetermination proper to thought, of a movement that removed statements from any univocal determination. If I have taken the liberty of referring to this relation to Marx's work, it is in order to make it clear that there could be no full adherence to his thought, no question of resting firmly on his theory, as soon it became apparent that, at one and the same time and somewhat paradoxically, the proletariat provided me with the guarantee of social practice and history while the guarantee of this guarantee—namely, Marx's thought—was the object of my questioning. It was inevitable that the moment would come when my earlier certainties would crumble.

The second reason I referred to concerns my experience, while still very young, as a militant in a small political group. I think a brief mention of this will throw light on what I have to say. I joined the Trotskyist party before the end of the war and remained in it for about four years. This group originated, as is well known, in the condemnation of Stalinism. It presented itself as the legitimate heir of Marxism-Leninism, claimed to be taking up the task initiated by the Russian Revolution and prefigured in the Paris Commune; it denounced the counter-revolutionary role of the Communist parties, seeing them as carrying out, *mutatis mutandis*,

the same role once played by the social democrats. Whereas the Third International had condemned the betrayal of the interests of the proletariat by the Second International, the Fourth now condemned the Third International and, in short, demanded a return to primal sources. The Trotskyist party claimed allegiance to a founding hero, Trotsky, a hero who was both dead and immortal, and claimed allegiance more generally to a dynasty; immortality was embodied in the crown that had been worn successively by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. And that crown guaranteed the immortality of the "body" of the revolutionaries. Stalin, on the other hand, was represented as the usurper that the body of the revolutionaries would expel. Now it gradually occurred to me that the Trotskyist party functioned like a microbureaucracy, despite the rules of so-called democratic centralism which allowed a conflict of tendencies—a conflict that was intense at times. The power of the apparatus, the division between leaders and followers, the manipulation of meetings, the withholding of information, the separation of activities, the stereotyped character of the dominant discourse in its various forms, the imperviousness to events that might challenge the correctness of practice and theory: innumerable such signs convinced me that, despite the enormous gulf between our group and the Communist Party, one could find in the former a tiny replica of the latter. What concerned me was that this microbureaucracy had no basis of a material kind. The positions of power occupied by a small number of militants were ultimately based on the possession of a certain knowledge, a skill in speaking and, to be more precise, the ability to inscribe every internal or external fact in a mytho-history. Russia provided the privileged context for this. It would be impossible here to enumerate all the sacred episodes that, from the formation of Bolshevism to the Stalinist betrayals, made up the register on which the present acquired its meaning. The function of this mytho-history, of the discourse that found its referent there, profoundly disturbed me. After all, this was precisely how I exercised whatever power I had in the party.

It seems to me that not only are we confronted by the problem of bureaucracy, but that certain elements of totalitarianism are to be found here. I don't mean, of course, that I regard the small party to which I belonged as a totalitarian embryo. That is certainly not the case. Indeed it did not have the means of being so. But what strikes me, and already struck me then, was the closed nature of the party, supported by a dis-

course that was supposedly scientific, declaring the rationality of the real and governed throughout by the representation of what had taken place—of the already-done, the already-thought, the already-seen. This discourse is fundamentally invulnerable; it is subject to error and rectification in fact, but not in principle. It imprints the signs of the real in a text—that of the great authors, but more usually that of a founding past—and it constantly nourishes the reading of the great text with these signs. And what strikes me no less is that the closed nature of this discourse derives from the fact that it is the discourse of no one person: it is the discourse of the party, the ideal body of the revolutionary, which traverses each of its members. Each individual sees himself caught up in an *us*, a *nous*, which imposes a break with the outside; the things of the world, which everybody talks about so much, can be grasped only by being carried back to the imaginary enclosure of history, of which the party is the trustee. And while the militant is incorporated, the supposed real is destined to be assimilated.

The two experiences that I have described are not unrelated. The first cannot be confined to the sphere of theory, the second to the sphere of practice. Being a militant presupposes a certain relationship to knowledge. Every Communist is a person of knowledge, his identity is bound up with a body of knowledge that enables him to apprehend texts and things. The adventure of interpretation, on the other hand, implies a relation to power. To read a work, and I have experienced this even more in connection with Machiavelli than with Marx, is to allow yourself to lose the bearings which assured you of your sovereign distance from the other, which assured you of the distinction between subject and object, active and passive, speaking and hearing (to interpret is to convert reading into writing), the difference between one time and another, between past and present (the latter can neither be suppressed nor ignored), lastly it is to lose your sense of the division between the space of the work and the world on to which it opens. Thus by different paths, which cross and recross, I was gradually led to carry my questioning to the very center of Marxist certainty.

I have now come to the question that I wanted to pose, after giving a brief indication of how I arrived at it. Why is totalitarianism a major event in our time, why does it require us to probe the nature of modern society? At the foundation of totalitarianism lies the representation of the People-as-One. It is denied that division is constitutive of society.

In the so-called socialist world, there can be no other division than that between the people and its enemies: a division between inside and outside, no internal division. After the revolution, socialism is not only supposed to prepare the way for the emergence of a classless society, it must already manifest that society which bears within itself the principle of homogeneity and self-transparency. The paradox is the following: division is denied—I say denied, since a new dominant stratum is actively distinguishing itself from the rest of society, since a state apparatus is separating itself off from society—and, at the same time as this denial, a division is being affirmed, on the level of phantasy, between the People-as-One and the Other. This Other is the other of the outside. It is a term to be taken literally: the Other is the representative of the forces deriving from the old society (kulaks, bourgeoisie) and the emissary of the foreigner, the imperialist world. Indeed these two representations converge, for it is always imagined that the representatives of the old society are linked up with foreign centers. So it is understandable that the constitution of the People-as-One requires the incessant production of enemies. It is not only necessary to convert, at the level of phantasy, real adversaries of the regime or real opponents into the figures of the evil Other: it is also necessary to invent them. However, this interpretation can be carried further. The campaigns of exclusion, persecution, and, for quite awhile, terror reveal a new image of the social body. The enemy of the people is regarded as a parasite or a waste product to be eliminated. The documents assembled by Solzhenitsyn, some of which have been known for a very long time, are highly instructive in this regard. The pursuit of the enemies of the people is carried out in the name of an ideal of social prophylaxis, and this has been the case since Lenin's time. What is at stake is always the integrity of the body. It is as if the body had to assure itself of its own identity by expelling its waste matter, or as if it had to close in upon itself by withdrawing from the outside, by averting the threat of an intrusion by alien elements. So there must be no failures in the functioning of institutions, failures that might suggest a relaxation in the monitoring of the mechanism of elimination or an attack from disruptive agents. The campaign against the enemy is feverish; fever is good, it is a signal, within society, that there is some evil to combat.

It should also be observed that in totalitarian ideology, the representation of the People-as-One is in no way contradictory with that of

the party. The party does not appear as distinct from the people or from the proletariat, which is the quintessence of it. It does not have a specific reality *within* society. The party *is* the proletariat in the sense that it is identical with it. At the same time, it is the guide or, as Lenin put it, the consciousness of the proletariat; or, as I would say, using an old political metaphor, to which I shall come back, it is its head. And, similarly, the representation of the People-as-One is not in contradiction with that of an omnipotent, omniscient power, with, in the last analysis, that of the *Egocrat* (to use Solzhenitsyn's term), the ultimate figure of that power. Such a power, detached from the social whole, towering over everything, merges with the party, with the people, with the proletariat. It merges with the body as a whole, while at the same time it is its head. A whole sequence of representations is to be found here, the logic of which should not escape us. Identification of the people with the proletariat, of the proletariat with the party, of the party with the leadership, of the leadership with the *Egocrat*. On each occasion, an organ is both the whole and the detached part that makes the whole, that institutes it. This logic of identification, secretly governed by the image of the body, accounts in turn for the condensation that takes place between the principle of power, the principle of law and the principle of knowledge. The denial of social division goes hand in hand with the denial of a symbolic distinction which is constitutive of society. The attempt to incorporate power in society, society in the state, implies that there is nothing, in a sense, that can indicate an externality to the social and to the organ that represents it by detaching itself from it. The dimension of law and the dimension of knowledge tend to be effaced, insofar as they do not, as we know very well, belong to the order of things which are socially (or indeed psychologically) conceivable, insofar as they cannot be located in empirical social life, insofar as they establish the very condition of human sociability. A kind of positivisation of the manifest law takes place through intense legislative, legal activity, at the service of the totalitarian state; and a sort of positivisation of manifest knowledge takes place through intense ideological activity—ideology becoming that enterprise of phantasy which tends to produce and to fix the ultimate foundations of knowledge in every sphere. In fact, what one sees is the attempt by power to appropriate the law and the knowledge of the principles and ultimate goals of social life. But this language is still inadequate, for it would be wrong to attribute power with unbridled

freedom; to do so would be to confuse, once again, arbitrary power with totalitarian power. Of course, it is true that in innumerable ways power manipulates and subjugates legal rules and "ideas." But one must also see that it is caught up in ideology: the power of discourse is fully affirmed, while the true discourse becomes a discourse of power.

And we must also see that the law, positivized and reduced to the law of socialism, regulates power and renders it opaque to itself, more opaque than it ever was before.

This very sketchy interpretation is concerned only, I should like to stress, with the aim of totalitarianism. It is not my purpose here to inquire into the facts of social development and change. Were this the case, I would have to try to analyze all the forms of resistance to the totalitarian project—and I am not speaking here of conscious, political resistance, but of the social relations that elude the grip of power. I would also have to try to analyze all the pathological processes of the bureaucratic world, for the perversion of the function of power, of law and of knowledge has effects on the whole of social life—let us be in no doubt—even when there is not, or no longer, any support for the regime. Among others, Alexander Zinoviev is one of the most severe analysts of this pathology.

My purpose is rather to bring out, and to submit to the reader's questioning, the image of the political body in totalitarianism. It is an image which, on the one hand, requires the exclusion of the malevolent Other and which, simultaneously, breaks down into the image of a whole and a part that stands for the whole, of a part that paradoxically reintroduces the figure of the other, the omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent other, the militant, the leader, the Egocrat. This other offers his own body—individual, mortal, endowed with all the virtues—whether he is called Stalin or Mao or Fidel. A mortal body which is perceived as invulnerable, which condenses in itself all strengths, all talents, and defies the laws of nature by his super-male energy.

Of course, I am aware that I am drawing on only one thread of the interpretation. I cannot develop this remark here, but I should like to suggest that we ought to examine another pole of the totalitarian representation—that of the organization. Or, to use another term which is more likely to convey the discordance within the totalitarian representation, I would say that the image of the body is combined with that of the machine. The scientifico-technical model and the model of the produc-

tion enterprise, governed by the rational division of labor, have not only been imported from Western capitalism, but have in a sense taken hold of the whole society. Socialism seems to be linked, at least in an ideal way, with the formula of a harmonious society, in touch with itself through all its parts, delivered from the dysfunctions of a system in which the various sectors of activity each obeyed specific norms and in which their interdependence remained at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the market. The new society is presented as a single organization comprising a network of micro-organizations; furthermore, it is presented paradoxically as that "great automaton" which Marx claimed to uncover in the capitalist mode of production. It is worth pointing out that such a representation is split in two: the social, in its essence, is defined as organization and as the organizable. From the first point of view, socialist man is the man of the organization, imprinted in it; from the second point of view, he is the constantly working organizer, the social engineer. But it is important above all to note the articulation of the two key images, that of the body and that of the machine. In a sense, they are convergent: they involve an ambiguity of the same kind. In the first case, the political agent is dissolved in an us that speaks, hears, reads reality through him, thus identifying himself with the party, the body of the people and, at the same rime, representing himself, through the same identification, as the head of that body, attributing consciousness to himself. In the second case, the same agent proves to be a part of the machine, or one of its organs, or a driving belt—a frequently used metaphor—and at the same time an activist-machinist who makes decisions concerning the functioning and production of society. However, the two images do not fully merge; the image of the body is altered when it comes into contact with that of the machine. The latter contradicts the logic of identification; the Communist "us" is itself dissolved. The notion of the organization, even though it gives rise to that of the organizer, poses a threat to the substance of the body politic, making the social appear at the boundaries of the inorganic.

I shall now dare to ask the question, from where does the totalitarian adventure arise? It is not born out of nothing. It is the sign of a political mutation. But what is that mutation? It seems to me that it would be futile to try to analyze it at the level of the mode of production, as the consequence of a final concentration of capital; but it would be equally futile to treat it, as some have been content to do, as the product of the

phantasies of revolutionary intellectuals, seeking to complete the work of the Jacobins of 1793 in order to reconstruct the world on a *tabula rasa*. In my view, totalitarianism can be clarified only by grasping its relationship with democracy. It is from democracy that it arises, even though it has taken root initially, at least in its socialist version, in countries where the democratic transformation was only just beginning. It overturns that transformation, while at the same time taking over some of its features and extending them at the level of phantasy.

In what characteristics can we discern this process? I believe that my brief comments on the image of the body politic indicate the lines of a response. For modern democracy is that regime in which such an image tends to vanish. I say *regime* advisedly. Taken in its conventional sense, this term is inadequate. Beyond a historically determined system of political institutions, I wish to call attention to a long-term process, what de Tocqueville called the democratic revolution, which he saw coming to birth in France under the *ancien régime* and which, since his time, has continued to develop. As we know, this revolution found its motive force in the equalization of *conditions*. However important this phenomenon may be, it does not shed enough light for my purpose and it leaves an essential mutation in the shadows: the society of the *ancien régime* represented its unity and its identity to itself as that of a body—a body which found its figuration in the body of the king, or rather which identified itself with the king's body, while at the same time it attached itself to it as its head. As Ernst Kantorowicz* has shown in a masterly fashion, such a symbolism was elaborated in the Middle Ages and is of theologico-political origin. The image of the king's body as a double body, both mortal and immortal, individual and collective, was initially underpinned by the body of Christ. The important point for my purpose—it would be quite outside the scope of this essay to analyze the many displacements of this representation in the course of history—is that, long after the features of liturgical royalty had died away, the king still possessed the power to incarnate in his body the community of the kingdom, now invested with the sacred, a political community, a national community, a mystical body. I am not unaware of the fact that in the eighteenth century this representation was

* See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957).

largely undermined, that new models of sociability emerged as a result of the growth of individualism, progress in the equalization of conditions of which de Tocqueville spoke and the development of the state administration, which tended to make the latter appear as an independent, impersonal entity. But the changes that occurred did not entirely eliminate the notion of the kingdom as a unity which was both organic and mystical, of which the monarch was at the same time the body and the head. It can also be seen that, paradoxically, the growth of social mobility and the increasing uniformity of behavior, customs, opinions and rules had the effect of strengthening rather than weakening the traditional symbolism. The *ancien régime* was made up of an infinite number of small bodies which gave individuals their distinctive marks. And these small bodies fitted together within a great imaginary body for which the body of the king provided the model and the guarantee of its integrity. The democratic revolution, for so long subterranean, burst out when the body of the king was destroyed, when the body politic was decapitated and when, at the same time, the corporeality of the social was dissolved. There then occurred what I would call a "disincorporation" of individuals. This was an extraordinary phenomenon, the consequences of which seemed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, absurd, even monstrous, not only to conservatives, but to many liberals. For these individuals might become entities that would have to be counted in a universal suffrage that would take the place of the universal invested in the body politic. The relentless struggle to combat the idea of universal suffrage is not only the indication of a class struggle. The inability to conceive of this suffrage as anything other than a dissolution of the social is extremely instructive. The danger of numbers is greater than the danger of an intervention by the masses on the political scene; the idea of number as such is opposed to the idea of the substance of society. Number breaks down unity, destroys identity.

But if we must speak of a disincorporation of the individual, we must also analyze the disengagement of civil society from a state, itself hitherto consubstantial with the body of the king. Or, to put it another way, we must examine the emergence of social relations, not only economic ones, but legal, educational, and scientific relations which have their own dynamic; and, more specifically, we must examine the disentangling of the spheres of power, law, and knowledge that takes place when the identity of the body politic disappears. The modern democratic revolution

is best recognized in this mutation: there is no power linked to a body. Power appears as an empty place and those who exercise it as mere mortals who occupy it only temporarily or who could install themselves in it only by force or cunning. There is no law that can be fixed, whose articles cannot be contested, whose foundations are not susceptible of being called into question. Lastly, there is no representation of a center and of the contours of society: unity cannot now efface social division. Democracy inaugurates the experience of an ungraspable, uncontrollable society in which the people will be said to be sovereign, of course, but whose identity will constantly be open to question, whose identity will remain latent.

I referred to the experience of an ungraspable society. It is true that this society gives rise to a multilayered discourse which tries to grasp it; and in this sense it emerges as an object, by the very fact that it is no longer imprinted in the order of nature or in some supernatural order. But it seems remarkable to me that the discourse that may be imputed to bourgeois ideology was maintained in the early days of democracy under the threat of a breakup of society as such. The institutions and values proclaimed—Property, the Family, the State, Authority, the Nation, Culture—were presented as bastions against barbarism, against the unknown forces from without that could destroy society and civilization. The attempt to sacralize institutions through discourse is directly related to the loss of the substance of society, to the disintegration of the body. The bourgeois cult of order which is sustained by the affirmation of authority, in its many forms, by the declaration of the rules and the proper distances between those who occupy the position of master, owner, cultivated man, civilized man, normal man, adult and those who are placed in the position of the *other*, this whole cult testifies to a certain vertigo in face of the void created by an indeterminate society.

However, as I have just suggested, we must be attentive to another aspect of the mutation. What emerges with democracy is the image of society as such, society as purely human but, at the same time, society sui generis, whose own nature requires objective knowledge. It is the image of a society which is homogeneous in principle, capable of being subsumed to the overview of knowledge and power, arising through the dissolution of the monarchical focus of legitimacy and the destruction of the architecture of bodies. It is the image of the omniscient, omnipotent state, of a state both anonymous and, as de Tocqueville puts it, tutelary. It is also,

insofar as inequality exists within the boundaries of the equality of conditions, the image of a mass that passes the last judgment on good and evil, the true and the false, the normal and the abnormal, the image of sovereign opinion. Lastly, what emerges is the image of the people, which, as I observed, remains indeterminate, but which nevertheless is susceptible of being determined, of being actualized on the level of phantasy as an image of the People-as-One.

From this point of view, may not totalitarianism be conceived as a response to the questions raised by democracy, as an attempt to resolve its paradoxes? Modern democratic society seems to me, in fact, like a society in which power, law, and knowledge are exposed to a radical indetermination, a society that has become the theatre of an uncontrollable adventure, so that what is instituted never becomes established, the known remains undermined by the unknown, the present proves to be undefinable, covering many different social times which are staggered in relation to one another within simultaneity—or definable only in terms of some fictitious future; an adventure such that the quest for identity cannot be separated from the experience of division. This society is *historical* society par excellence. What seems to me to be condensed beneath the paradoxes of democracy is the status of power, for this power is not, as a certain contemporary discourse naïvely repeats, a mere organ of domination: it is the agency of legitimacy and identity. Now, as long as it appears detached from the prince, as long as it presents itself as the power of no one, as long as it seems to move towards a *latent* focus—namely, the people—it runs the risk of having its symbolic function cancelled out, of falling into collective representations at the level of the real, the contingent, when the conflicts are becoming sharper and leading society to the edge of collapse. Political power, as circumscribed and localized in society at the same time as being an instituting moment, is exposed to the threat of falling into particularity, of arousing what Machiavelli regarded as more dangerous than hatred, namely, contempt; and similarly those who exercise it or aspire to it are exposed to the threat of appearing as individuals or groups concerned solely to satisfy their desires. With totalitarianism an apparatus is set up which tends to stave off this threat, which tends to weld power and society back together again, to efface all signs of social division, to banish the indetermination that haunts the democratic experience. But this attempt, as I have suggested, itself draws on a democratic source,

developing and fully affirming the idea of the People-as-One, the idea of society as such, bearing the knowledge of itself, transparent to itself and homogeneous, the idea of mass opinion, sovereign and normative, the idea of the tutelary state.

Since the advent of democracy, and in opposition to it, the body is thus revitalized. But it is important to point out that what is revitalized is quite different from what was once torn apart. The image of the body that informed monarchical society was underpinned by that of Christ. It was invested with the idea of the division between the visible and the invisible, the idea of the splitting of the mortal and the immortal, the idea of mediation, the idea of a production which both effaced and reestablished the difference between the producer and that produced, the idea of the unity of the body and the distinction between the head and the limbs. The prince condensed in his person the principle of power, the principle of law and the principle of knowledge, but he was *supposed* to obey a superior power; he declared himself to be both above the law and subjected to the law, to be both the father and the son of justice; he possessed wisdom but he was subjected to reason. According to the medieval formula, he was *major et minor se ipso*, above and below himself. That does not seem to be the position of the Egocrat or of his substitutes, the bureaucratic leaders. The Egocrat coincides with himself, as society is supposed to coincide with itself. An impossible swallowing up of the body in the head begins to take place, as does an impossible swallowing up of the head in the body. The attraction of the whole is no longer dissociated from the attraction of the parts. Once the old organic constitution disappears, the death instinct is unleashed into the closed, uniform, imaginary space of totalitarianism.

Such, then, are a few thoughts which indicate the direction for a questioning of the political. Some readers will no doubt suspect that my reflections are nourished by psychoanalysis. That is indeed the case. But this connection is meaningful only if one asks oneself at which hearth Freud's thought was lit. For is it not true that in order to sustain the ordeal of the division of the subject, in order to dislodge the reference points of the *self* and the *other*, to depose the position of the possessor of power and knowledge, one must assume responsibility for an experience instituted by democracy, the indetermination that was born from the loss of the substance of the body politic?

13

German Nihilism*
(1941)

Leo Strauss

I

What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon? I am not able to *answer* these questions; I can merely try to *elaborate* them a little. For the phenomenon which I am going to discuss is much too complex, and much too little explored, to permit of an adequate description within the short time at my disposal. I cannot do more than to scratch its surface.

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* This was a lecture that Strauss delivered in the General Seminar of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research on February 26, 1941. "German Nihilism" was first published in the journal *Interpretation* in the spring of 1999. That edition comes from a typewritten manuscript found in the Leo Strauss papers at the University of Chicago. This manuscript includes Strauss's rather extensive handwritten and typewritten additions and corrections. Professors David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, in preparing the text for initial publication, incorporated those corrections and added some additional information about names and texts in endnotes. Their endnotes also document precisely where Strauss made changes to his original typescript. I have retained the endnotes that included information about names and texts, but have omitted the notes dealing with Strauss's textual emendations. Those interested in the more extensive editorial apparatus should consult "German Nihilism," *Interpretation* 26:3 (Spring 1999), 352–378. The version published here also includes some minor corrections to this initial publication. See Wiebke Meier, "Corrections to Leo Strauss, 'German Nihilism,'" *Interpretation* 28:1 (Fall 2000).

2. When we hear at the present time the expression "German nihilism," most of us naturally think at once of National Socialism. It must however be understood from the outset rhat National Socialism is only the most *famous* form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unenlightened and most dishonorable form. It is probable that its very vulgarity accounts for its great, if appalling, successes. These successes may be followed by failures, and ultimately by complete defeat. Yet the defeat of National Socialism will nor necessarily mean the end of German nihilism. For that nihilism has deeper roots than the preachings of Hitler, Germany's defeat in rhe World War and all rhar.

To explain German nihilism, I propose to proceed in the following way. I shall first explain the *ultimate motive* which is underlying German nihilism; this motive is not in itself nihilistic. I shall then describe the *situation* in which that non-nihilistic motive led to nihilistic aspirations. Finally, I shall attempt to give such a *definition* of nihilism as is not assailable from the point of view of the non-nihilistic motive in question, and on rhe basis of that definition, to describe German nihilism somewhat more fully.

3. Nihilism might mean: *velle nihil*, to will the nothing, the destruction of everything, including oneself, and therefore primarily the will to self-destruction. I am told that there are human beings who have such strange desires. I do not believe, however, that such a desire is the ultimate motive of German nihilism. Not only does the unarmed eye not notice any unambiguous signs of a will to self-destruction. But even if such a desire were *demonstrated* to be the ultimate motive, we still should be at a loss to understand why that desire took on the form, nor of the mood called *fin de siècle* or of alcoholism, but of militarism. To explain German nihilism in terms of mental diseases, is even less advisable than it is to explain in such terms the desire of a cornered gangster to bump off together with himself a couple of cops and the fellow who double-crossed him; not being a Stoic, I could not call *that* desire a morbid desire.

The fact of the matter is that German nihilism is not absolute nihilism, desire for the destruction of everything including oneself, but a desire for the destruction of something *specific*: of *modern* civilization. That, if I may say so, limited nihilism *becomes* an *almost* absolute nihilism only for this reason: because the negation of modern civilization, the No, is not guided, or accompanied, by any clear positive conception.

German nihilism desires the destruction of modern civilization as far as modern civilization has a *moral* meaning. As everyone knows, it does not object so much to modern *technical* devices. That moral meaning of modern civilization to which the German nihilists object, is expressed in formulations such as these: to relieve man's estate; or: to safeguard the rights of man; or: the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number. What is the motive underlying the protest against modern civilization, against the spirit of the *West*, and in particular of the *Anglo-Saxon* West?

The answer must be: it is a *moral* protest. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the internationalism inherent in modern civilization, or, more precisely, that the establishment of a perfectly *open* society which is as it were the goal of modern civilization, and therefore all aspirations directed toward that goal, are irreconcilable with the basic demands of *moral life*. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the root of all moral life is essentially and therefore eternally the *closed* society; from the conviction that the open society is bound to be, if not immoral, at least amoral: the meeting ground of seekers of pleasure, of gain, of irresponsible power, indeed of any kind of irresponsibility and lack of seriousness.[1]

Moral life, it is asserted, means *serious* life. Seriousness, and the ceremonial of seriousness—the flag and the oath to the flag—are the distinctive features of the *closed* society, of the society which by its very nature is constantly confronted with, and basically oriented toward, the *Ernstfall*,* the serious moment, M-day, *war*. Only life in such a *tense* atmosphere, only a life which is based on constant awareness of the *sacrifices* to which it owes its existence, and of the necessity, the *duty* of sacrifice of life and all worldly goods, is truly human: the sublime is unknown to the open society. The societies of the West which claim to aspire toward the open society, actually are closed societies in a state of disintegration: their moral value, their respectability, depends *entirely* on their still being closed societies.

Let us pursue this argument a little further. The open society, it is asserted, is actually impossible. Its possibility is not proved at all by what is called the *progress* toward the open society. For that progress is largely fictitious or merely verbal. Certain basic facts of human nature which have been honestly recognized by earlier generations who used to call a spade a spade, are at the present time verbally denied, superficially covered over

* Emergency.

by fictions legal and others, e.g., by the belief that one can abolish war by pacts not backed by military forces punishing him who breaks the pact, or by calling ministries of *war* ministries of *defence*, or by calling punishment sanctions, or by calling capital punishment *das höchste Strafmass*.* The open society is morally inferior to the closed society also because the former is *based* on hypocrisy.

The conviction underlying the protest against modern civilization has *basically* nothing to do with bellicism, with *love* of war; nor with nationalism: for there were closed societies which were not nations; it has indeed something to do with what is called the sovereign state, insofar as the sovereign state offers the best modern example of a closed society in the sense indicated. The conviction I am trying to describe is *not*, to repeat, in its origin a love of war: it is rather a love of morality, a sense of responsibility for endangered morality. The historians in our midst know that conviction, or passion, from Glaukon's, Plato's brother's, passionate protest against the city of pigs, in the name of noble virtue.[2] They know it, above all, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilization of the century of taste, and from Friedrich Nietzsche's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilization of the century of industry. It was the same passion—let there be no mistake about that—which turned, if in a much more passionate and infinitely less intelligent form, against the alleged or real corruption of postwar Germany: against "the subhuman beings of the big cities (*die Untermerzschen der Grossstadt*)," against "cultural bolshevism (*Kulturbolschewismus*)," etc. That passion, or conviction, is then not in itself nihilistic, as is shown by the examples of Plato and Rousseau, if examples are needed at all. (One may even wonder whether it has not a sound element, remembering, e.g., the decision of the Oxford students not to fight for king and country and some more recent facts.) While not being nihilistic in itself, and perhaps even not entirely unsound, that conviction *led* however to nihilism in postwar Germany owing to a number of circumstances. Of those circumstances, I shall mention in the survey which follows only those which, to my mind, have not been sufficiently emphasized in the discussions of this seminar nor in the literature on the subject.

* The Maximum penalty.

4. One would have to possess a gift which I totally lack, the gift of a lyrical reporter, in order to give those of you who have not lived for many years in postwar Germany an adequate idea of the *emotions* underlying German nihilism. Let me tentatively define nihilism as the desire to destroy the present world and its potentialities, a desire not accompanied by any clear conception of what one wants to put in its place. And let us try to understand how such a desire could develop.

No one could be satisfied with the postwar world. German liberal democracy of all descriptions seemed to many people to be absolutely unable to cope with the difficulties with which Germany was confronted. This created a profound prejudice, or confirmed a profound prejudice already in existence, against liberal democracy as such. Two articulate alternatives to liberal democracy were open. One was simple reaction, as expressed by the Crown Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria in about these terms: "Some people say that the wheel of history cannot be turned back. This is an error." The other alternative was more interesting. The older ones in our midst still remember the time when certain people asserted that the conflicts inherent in the present situation would necessarily lead to a revolution, accompanying or following another World War—a rising of the proletariat and of the proletarianized strata of society which would usher in the withering away of the State, the classless society, the abolition of all exploitation and injustice, the era of final peace. It was this prospect at least as much as the desperate present, which led to nihilism. The prospect of a pacified planet, without rulers and ruled, of a planetary society devoted to production and consumption only, to the production and consumption of spiritual as well as material merchandise, was positively horrifying to quite a few very intelligent and very decent, if very young, Germans. They did not object to that prospect because they were worrying about their own economic and social position; for certainly in that respect they had no longer anything to lose. Nor did they object to it for religious reasons; for, as one of their spokesmen (E. Jünger*) said, they *knew* that they were the sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of godless men.[3] What they hated was the very prospect of a world in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, in which everyone would have his little pleasure by day

* Ernst Jünger (1895–1998) was an influential and widely read German writer who first attained fame with his account of his experiences in World War I, *Storm of Steel* (1920). His other prominent works include *On Pain* (1934) and *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939).

and his little pleasure by night, a world in which no great heart could beat and no great soul could breathe, a world without real, unmetaphoric, sacrifice, i.e., a world without blood, sweat, and tears. What to the Communists appeared to be the fulfilment of *the* dream of mankind, appeared to those young Germans as the greatest debasement of humanity, as the coming of the end of humanity, as the arrival of the latest man. They did not really know, and thus they were unable to express in a tolerably clear language, what they desired to put in the place of the present world and its allegedly necessary future or sequel: the only thing of which they were absolutely certain was that the present world and all the potentialities of the present world as such, must be destroyed in order to prevent the otherwise necessary coming of the Communist final order: literally anything, the *nothing*, the chaos, the jungle, the Wild West, the Hobbian state of nature, seemed to them infinitely better than the Communist-anarchist-pacifist future. Their Yes was inarticulate—they were unable to say more than: No! This No proved however sufficient as *the* preface to action, to the action of destruction. This is the phenomenon which occurs to me first whenever I hear the expression German nihilism.

It is hardly necessary to point out the fallacy committed by the young men in question. They simply took over the Communist thesis that the proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship is necessary, if civilization is not to perish. But they insisted rather more than the Communists on the conditional character of the Communist prediction (*if* civilization is not to perish). That condition left room for *choice*: they chose what according to the Communists was the only alternative to Communism. In other words: they admitted that all rational argument was in favor of Communism; but they opposed to that apparently invincible argument what they called "irrational decision." Unfortunately, all rational argument they knew of, was *historical* argument, more precisely: statements about the probable future, *predictions*, which were based on analysis of the past and, above all, of the present. For that modern astrology, predicting social science, had taken hold of a very large part of the academic youth.* I have emphasized the fact that the nihilists were *young* people.

* Strauss would become a prominent and persistent critic of modern social science. See, for example, chapter 2 of *Natural Right and History* and "An Epilogue," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, edited by Herbert Storing. The latter essay can also be found in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited by Hilail Gildin.

5. One or the other modern pedagogue would perhaps feel that not everything was bad in that nihilism. For, he might argue, it is not unnatural that the intelligent section of a young generation should be dissatisfied with what they are told to believe by the older generation, and that they should have a strong desire for a *new* word, for a word expressing *their* longings, and, considering that moderation is not a virtue of youth, for an *extreme* word. Moreover, he would conceivably say, it is not unnatural that the young people, being constitutionally unable to discover that new word, are unable to express in articulate language more than the negation of the aspirations of the older generation. A lover of paradoxes might be tempted to assert an essential affinity of youth to nihilism. I should be the last to deny the juvenile character of that specific nihilism which I have tried to describe. But I must disagree with the modern pedagogue all the more insofar as I am convinced that about the most dangerous thing for these young men was precisely what is called progressive education: they rather needed *old-fashioned teachers*, such old-fashioned teachers of course as would be undogmatic enough to understand the aspirations of their pupils. Unfortunately, the belief in old-fashioned teaching declined considerably in postwar Germany. The inroads which William II had made on the old and noble educational system founded by great liberals of the early nineteenth century were not discontinued, but rather enlarged by the Republic. To this one may add the influence of the *political* emancipation of youth, the fact frequently referred to as the children's vote. Nor ought we to forget that some of the young nihilists who refused to undergo severe *intellectual discipline*, were sons or younger brothers of men and women who had undergone what may be described as the *emotional discipline* of the youth movement, of a movement which preached the *emancipation* of youth. Our century has once been called the century of the child: in Germany it proved to be the age of the adolescent. Needless to say that not in all cases was the natural progress from adolescence to senility ever interrupted by a period however short of maturity. The decline of reverence for old age found its most telling expression in Hitler's shameless reference to the imminent death of the aged President Hindenburg.

I have alluded to the fact that the young nihilists were *atheists*. Broadly speaking, prior to the World War, atheism was a preserve of the radical Left, just as throughout history atheism had been connected with philosophic materialism. German philosophy was predominantly idealistic, and

the German idealists were theists or pantheists. Schopenhauer was, to my knowledge, the first nonmaterialist *and* conservative German philosopher who openly professed his atheism. But Schopenhauer's influence fades into insignificance if compared with that of *Nietzsche*. Nietzsche asserted that the atheist assumption is not only reconcilable with, but indispensable for, a radical antidemocratic, antisocialist, and antipacifist policy: according to him, even the Communist creed is only a secularized form of theism, of the belief in providence. There is no other philosopher whose influence on postwar German thought is comparable to that of Nietzsche, of the *atheist* Nietzsche. I cannot dwell on this important point, since I am not a theologian. A gentleman who is much more versed in theology than I am—Professor Carl Mayer of the Graduate Faculty—will certainly devote to this aspect of German nihilism all the attention which it requires in an article to be published in *Social Research*.[4]

The adolescents I am speaking of were in need of teachers who could explain to them in articulate language the positive, and not merely destructive, meaning of their aspirations. They believed to have found such teachers in that group of professors and writers who knowingly or ignorantly paved the way for Hitler (Spengler,* Moeller van den Bruck,† Carl Schmitt,‡ Bäumler,§ Ernst Jünger,¶ Heidegger). If we want to understand the singular success, not of Hitler, but of those writers, we must cast a quick glance at their opponents who were at the same time the opponents of the young nihilists. Those opponents committed frequently a grave mistake. They believed to have refuted the No by refuting the Yes, i.e., the inconsistent, if not silly, positive assertions of the young men. But

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* Spengler. See note on page 113.

† Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was a highly influential conservative thinker during the Weimar period. His major work, *The Third Reich*, argued for a conservative National Socialist revolution that would provide a fundamental break with the past and herald the beginning of a new era. He committed suicide in 1924.

‡ Carl Schmitt was a prominent German political philosopher and legal theorist who joined the Nazi party in 1933. Strauss wrote an early review of Schmitt's book, *The Concept of the Political*. The review can be found in the University of Chicago Press edition (1996) of Schmitt's book, translated with an introduction by George Schwab.

§ Alfred Bäumler, author of *Nietzsche, der Philosoph und Politiker*, (Leipzig 1931).

¶ See note on page 223.

one cannot refute what one has not *thoroughly* understood. And many opponents did not even try to understand the ardent passion underlying the negation of the present world and its potentialities. As a consequence, the very refutations confirmed the nihilists in their belief; all these refutations seemed to beg the question; most of the refutations seemed to consist of *pueris decantata*, of repetitions of things which the young people knew already by heart. Those young men had come to doubt seriously, and not merely methodically or methodologically, the *principles* of modern civilization; the great authorities of that civilization did no longer impress them; it was evident that only such opponents would have been listened to who knew that doubt from their own experience, who through years of hard and independent thinking had overcome it. Many opponents did not meet that condition. They had been brought up in the belief in the principles of modern civilization; and a belief in which one is brought up is apt to degenerate into *prejudice*. Consequently, the attitude of the opponents of the young nihilists tended to become *apologetic*. Thus it came to pass that the most ardent upholders of the principle of progress, of an essentially *aggressive* principle, were compelled to take a defensive stand; and, in the realm of the mind, taking a defensive stand looks like admitting defeat. The ideas of modern civilization appeared to the *young* generation to be the old ideas; thus the adherents of the ideal of progress were in the awkward position that they had to resist, in the manner of *conservateurs*, what in the meantime has been called the wave of the future. They made the impression of being loaded with the heavy burden of a tradition hoary with age and somewhat dusty, whereas the young nihilists, not hampered by any tradition, had complete freedom of movement—and in the wars of the mind no less than in real wars, freedom of action spells victory. The opponents of the young nihilists had all the advantages, but likewise all the disabilities, of the intellectually propertied class confronted by the intellectual proletarian, the sceptic. The situation of modern civilization in general, and of its backbone, which is modern science, both natural and civil in particular, appeared to be comparable to that of scholasticism shortly before the emergence of the new science of the seventeenth century: the technical perfection of the methods and terminology of the old school, Communism included, appeared to be a strong argument *against* the old school. For technical perfection is apt to hide the basic problems. Or, if you wish, the bird of the goddess of wisdom starts its flight only

when the sun is setting.* It was certainly characteristic of German post-war thought that the output of technical terms, at no time negligible in Germany, reached astronomic proportions. The only answer which could have impressed the young nihilists had to be given in nontechnical language. Only one answer was given which was adequate and which would have impressed the young nihilists if they had heard it. It was not however given by a German and it was given in the year 1940 only. Those young men who refused to believe that the period following the jump into liberty, following the Communist world revolution, would be the finest hour of mankind in general and of Germany in particular, would have been impressed as much as we were, by what Winston Churchill said after the defeat in Flanders about Britain's finest hour.[5] For one of their greatest teachers had taught them to see in Cannae the greatest moment in the life of that glory which was ancient Rome.[6]

6. I have tried to circumscribe the intellectual and moral situation in which a nihilism emerged which was not in all cases base in its origin. Moreover, I take it for granted that not everything to which the young nihilists objected, was unobjectionable, and that not every writer or speaker whom they despised, was respectable. Let us beware of a sense of solidarity which is not limited by discretion. And let us not forget that the highest duty of the scholar, truthfulness or justice, acknowledges no limits. Let us then not hesitate to look for one moment at the phenomenon which I called nihilism, from the point of view of the nihilists themselves. "Nihilism," they would say, is a slogan used by those who do not understand the new, who see merely the rejection of *their* cherished ideals, the destruction of *their* spiritual property, who judge the new by its first words and deeds, which are, of necessity, a caricature rather than an adequate expression. How can a reasonable man expect an adequate expression of the ideal of a new epoch at its beginning, considering that the owl of Minerva starts its flight when the sun is setting?† The Nazis? Hitler? The less is said about him, the better. He will soon be forgotten. He is merely the rather contemptible *tool* of "History": the midwife who assists at the birth of the new epoch, of a new spirit; and a midwife usually understands

* A paraphrase of Hegel's famous lines from the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."

† See preceding footnote.

nothing of the genius at whose birth she assists; she is not even supposed to be a competent gynecologist. A new reality is in the making; it is transforming the whole world; in the meantime there is: nothing, but—a fertile nothing. The Nazis are as unsubstantial as clouds; the sky is hidden at present by those clouds which announce a devastating storm, but at the same time the long-needed rain which will bring new life to the dried-up soil; and (here I am almost quoting) do not lose hope; what appears to you the end of the world, is merely the end of an epoch, of the epoch which began in 1517 or so. I frankly confess, I do not see how those can resist the voice of that siren who expect the answer to the first and the last question from "History," from the future *as such*; who mistake analysis of the present or past or future for philosophy; who believe in a progress toward a goal which is itself progressive and therefore undefinable; who are not guided by a *known* and *stable* standard: by a standard which is stable and not changeable, and which is known and not merely believed. In other words, the lack of resistance to nihilism seems to be due ultimately to the depreciation and the contempt of reason, which is one and unchangeable or it is not, and of science. For if reason is changeable, it is dependent on those forces which cause its changes; it is a servant and slave of the *emotions*; and it will be hard to make a distinction, which is not arbitrary, between noble and base emotions, once one has denied the rulership of reason. A German who could boast of a life-long intimate intercourse with the superhuman father of all nihilism, has informed us as reliably, as we were ever informed by any inspired author, that the originator of all nihilism admitted: "Just despise reason and science, the very highest power of man, and I have got you completely."[7]

7. I had to condense a number of recollections of what I have heard, seen, and read while I was living in Germany, into the foregoing fragmentary remarks, because I had to convey an *impression* of an irrational movement and of the frequently irrational reactions to it, rather than a reasoned argument. I have now, however, reached the point where I can venture to submit a definition of nihilism. I do this not without trepidation. Not because the definition which I am going to suggest does not live up to the requirements of an orderly definition (for I know that sins of that kind are the ones which are most easily forgiven); nor because it is in any way novel, but for precisely the opposite reason. It will seem to most of you that it is a commonplace and that it consists of commonplaces.

The only thing which I can say to justify myself, is this: I expected to find a definition of nihilism as a matter of course in Mr. Rauschning's well-known book.* Only my failure to discover such a definition in that book gives me the courage to indulge in what you will consider a triviality, if a necessary triviality.

I shall then say: Nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilization as such. A nihilist is then a man who *knows* the principles of civilization, if only in a superficial way. A merely uncivilised man, a savage, is not a nihilist. This is the difference between Ariovistus, the Teutonic chieftain whom Caesar defeated, and Hitler who otherwise have the characteristic qualities of the perfect barbarian (arrogance and cruelty) in common.[8] The Roman soldier who disturbed the circles of Archimedes, was not a nihilist, but just a soldier.[9] I said *civilization*, and not: *culture*. For I have noticed that many nihilists are great lovers of culture, as distinguished from, and opposed to, civilization. Besides, the term *culture* leaves it undetermined what the thing is which is to be cultivated (blood and soil or the mind), whereas the term civilization designates at once the process of making man a citizen, and not a slave; an inhabitant of cities, and not a rustic; a lover of peace, and not of war; a polite being, and not a ruffian. A tribal community may possess a culture, i.e., produce, and enjoy, hymns, songs, ornament of their clothes, of their weapons and pottery, dances, fairy tales and what not; it cannot however be civilised. I wonder whether the fact that Western man lost much of his former pride, a quiet and becoming pride, of his being civilised, is not at the bottom of the present lack of resistance to nihilism.

I shall try to be somewhat more precise. By civilization, we understand the conscious culture of humanity, i.e., of that which makes a human being a human being, i.e., the conscious culture of reason. Human reason is active, above all, in two ways: as regulating human conduct, and as attempting to understand whatever can be understood by man; as practical reason, and as theoretical reason. The pillars of civilization are therefore morals and science, and both united. For science without morals degenerates into cynicism, and thus destroys the basis of the scientific effort itself; and morals without science degenerates into superstition and

* Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939).

thus is apt to become fanatic cruelty. Science is the attempt to understand the universe and man; it is therefore identical with philosophy; it is not necessarily identical with *modern* science. By morals, we understand the rules of decent and noble conduct, as a reasonable man would understand them; those rules are by their nature applicable to any human being, although we may allow for the possibility that not all human beings have an equal natural aptitude for decent and noble conduct. Even the most violent sceptic cannot help from time to time despising, or at least excusing, this or that action and this or that man; a complete analysis of what is implied in such an action of despising, or even excusing, would lead to that well-known view of morals which I sketched. For our present purpose it will suffice if I illustrate decent and noble conduct by the remark that it is equally remote from inability to inflict physical or other pain as from deriving pleasure from inflicting pain. Or by the other remark that decent and noble conduct has to do, not so much with the natural *aim* of man, as with the *means* toward that aim: the view that the end sanctifies the means, is a tolerably complete expression of immoralism.

I deliberately excluded "art" from the definition of civilization. Hitler, the best-known champion of nihilism, is famous for his love of art and is even an artist himself. But I never heard that he had anything to do with search for truth or with any attempt to instill the seeds of virtue into the souls of his subjects. I am confirmed in this prejudice concerning "art" by the observation that the founding fathers of civilization who taught us what science is and what morals are, did not know the term art as it is in use since about 180 years, nor the term, and the discipline, aesthetics which is of equally recent origin. This is not to deny, but rather to assert, that there are close relations between science and morals on the one hand, and poetry and the other imitative arts on the other, but those relations are bound to be misunderstood, to the detriment of both science and morals as well as of poetry, if science and morals are not considered *the* pillars of civilization.

The definition which I suggested, has another implication, or advantage, which I must make explicit. I tentatively defined, at the beginning, nihilism as the desire to destroy the present civilization, *modern* civilization. By my second definition I intended to make clear that one cannot call the most radical critic of *modern* civilization as such, a nihilist.

Civilization is the conscious culture of reason. This means that civilization is not identical with human life or human existence. There were,

and there are, many human beings who do not partake of civilization. Civilization has a natural basis which it *finds*, which it does not create, on which it is dependent, and on which it has only a very limited influence. Conquest of nature, if not taken as a highly poetic overstatement, is a nonsensical expression. The natural basis of civilization shows itself for instance in the fact that all civilized communities as well as uncivilized ones are in need of armed force which they must use against their enemies from without and against the criminals within.

8. I presume, it is not necessary to prove that nihilism in the sense defined is dominant in Germany, and that nihilism characterizes at present Germany more than any other country. Japan, e.g., cannot be as nihilistic as Germany, because Japan has been much less civilized in the sense defined than was Germany. If nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilization as such, and if civilization is based on recognition of the fact that the subject of civilization is man as man, every interpretation of science and morals in terms of races, or of nations, or of cultures, is strictly speaking nihilistic. Whoever accepts the idea of a Nordic or German or Faustic science, e.g., rejects *eo ipso* the *idea* of science. Different "cultures" may have produced different types of "science"; but only one of them can be *true*, can be *science*. The nihilist implication of the nationalist interpretation of science in particular can be described somewhat differently in the following terms. Civilization is inseparable from *learning*, from the desire to learn from anyone who can teach us something worthwhile. The nationalist interpretation of science or philosophy implies that we cannot really learn anything worthwhile from people who do not belong to our nation or our culture. The few Greeks whom we usually have in mind when we speak of *the* Greeks, were distinguished from the barbarians, so to speak exclusively by their willingness to learn—even from barbarians; whereas the barbarian, the non-Greek barbarian as well as the Greek barbarian, believes that all his questions are solved by, or on the basis of, *his* ancestral tradition. Naturally, a man who would limit himself to asserting that one nation may have a greater aptitude to understanding phenomena of a certain type than other nations, would not be a nihilist: not the accidental *fate* of science or morals, but its essential *intention* is decisive for the definition of civilization and therewith of nihilism.

9. The nihilists in general, and the German nihilists in particular reject the principles of civilization as such. The question arises, in favor of

what do the German nihilists reject those principles? I shall try to answer that question to begin with on the basis of Mr. Rauschning's book. This will give me an opportunity to elucidate somewhat more the foregoing definition of nihilism.

Mr. Rauschning has called the foreign and domestic policy of the Nazis "the revolution of nihilism." This means: it is not, as it claims to be, "a new order in the making," but "the wasteful and destructive exploitation of irreplaceable resources, material, mental, and moral, accumulated through generations of fruitful labor" (XI). This would mean that N.S. is nihilistic in its effect, but it does not necessarily mean that it is nihilistic in its intention. What Rauschning says in this passage quoted about the Nazis, might conceivably be said of the Communist Revolution as well. And yet, one cannot call Communism a nihilist movement. If the Communist Revolution is nihilist, it is so in its consequences, but not in its intention. This reminds me of another remark of Rauschning's: he identifies nihilism with the "destruction of all traditional spiritual standards" (XII). What I object to, is the use of the term *traditional* in the definition of nihilism. It is evident that not all traditional spiritual standards are, by their nature, beyond criticism and even rejection: we seek what is good, and not what we have inherited, to quote Aristotle.[10] In other words, I believe it is dangerous, if the opponents of National Socialism withdraw to a mere conservatism which defines its ultimate goal by a specific *tradition*. The temptation to fall back from an unimpressive present on an impressive past—and every past is as such impressive—is very great indeed. We ought not, however, cede to that temptation, if for no other reason, at least for this that *the* Western tradition is not so homogeneous as it may appear as long as one is engaged in polemics or in apologetics. To mention one example out of many: the great tradition of which Voltaire is a representative, is hard to reconcile with the tradition of which Bellarmine is a representative, even if both traditions should be equally hostile to National Socialism. Besides, I wish, Mr. Rauschning had not spoken of *spiritual* standards; this savours of the view that materialism is essentially nihilistic; I believe that materialism is an error, but I have only to recall the names of Democritus and Hobbes in order to realize that materialism is not essentially nihilistic. Not to mention the fact that a certain anti-materialism or idealism is at the bottom of German nihilism.

Rauschning operates on somewhat safer ground when he stresses the Nazis' lack of any settled aims. He understands then by German nihilism

the "permanent revolution of sheer destruction" for the sake of destruction, a "revolution for its own sake" (248). He stresses the "aimlessness" of the Nazis; he says that they have no program except action; that they replace doctrine by tactics (75); he calls their revolution "a revolution without a doctrine" (55); he speaks of the "total rejection" by the Nazis "of any sort of doctrine" (56). This appears to be an exaggeration. For elsewhere Rauschning says: "One thing National Socialism is not: a doctrine or philosophy. Yet it *has* a philosophy." (23). Or: "the fight against Judaism, while it is beyond question a central element not only in material considerations, but in those of cultural policy, is part of the party doctrine" (22).

Their anti-Jewish policy does seem to be taken seriously by the Nazis. But even if it were true, that no single point of the original party program or party doctrine had a more than provisional and tactical meaning, we still should be at a loss to understand a party, a government, a State—not merely without a program or doctrine—but without any *aims*. For it seems hard to conceive how any human being can act without having an aim. John Dillinger* probably had no program, but he doubtless had an aim. In other words: Rauschning has not considered carefully enough the difference between program and aim. If he defines nihilism as a political movement without aims, then he defines a nonentity; if he defines nihilism as a political movement without a program or doctrine, then he would have to call all opportunists nihilists, which would be too uncharitable to be true.

As a matter of fact, Rauschning does not always deny that the Nazis have aims: "a permanent revolution of sheer destruction by means of which a dictatorship of brute force maintains itself in power" (xif.). Here, Rauschning *states* the aim of the Nazis: that aim is their power, they do not destroy in order to destroy, but in order to maintain themselves in power. Now, to keep themselves in power, they depend, to a certain extent, on their ability to make their subjects, the Germans, happy, on their ability to satisfy the needs of the Germans. This means, as matters stand, that, in order to maintain themselves in power, they must embark upon a policy of aggression, a policy directed toward world dominion.

Rauschning corrects his remark about the aimlessness of the Nazis by saying "the German aims are indefinite to-day only because they are

* John Dillinger was an American gangster who went on a spectacular string of bank robberies during 1933.

infinite" (275). Their "goal" is "the world-wide totalitarian empire" (58). They have not only aims, their aims form even a hierarchy leading up to a principal aim: "the principal aim, the redistribution of the world" (229). German nihilism, as described by Rauschning, is then the aspiration to world dominion exercised by the Germans who are dominated in their turn by a German *élite*; that aspiration becomes nihilistic, because it uses *any* means to achieve its end and thus destroys everything which makes life worth living for any decent or intelligent being. However low an opinion we may have of the Nazis, I am inclined to believe that they desire German world dominion not merely as a means for keeping themselves in power, but that they derive, so to speak, a disinterested pleasure from the prospect of that glamorous goal "Germany ruling the world." I should even go one step further and say that the Nazis probably derive a disinterested pleasure from the aspect of those human qualities which enable nations to conquer. I am certain that the Nazis consider any pilot of a bomber or any submarine commander absolutely superior in human dignity to any traveling salesman or to any physician or to the representative of any other relatively peaceful occupation. For, a German nihilist much more intelligent and much more educated than Hitler himself has stated: "What kind of minds are those who do not even know this much that no mind *can* be more profound and more knowing than that of *any* soldier who fell anywhere at the Somme or in Flanders? *This* is the standard of which we are in need." ("Was aber sind das für Geister, die noch nicht einmal wissen, dass kein Geist tiefer and wissender sein kann als der jedes beliebigen Soldaten, der irgendwo an der Somme oder in Flandern fiel? Dies ist der Massstab, dessen wir bedürftig sind." Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 201.) The admiration of the warrior as a type, the unconditional preference given to the warrior as warrior, is however not only *genuine* in German nihilism: it is even its distinctive feature. Our question: in favor of what does German nihilism reject the principles of civilization as such must therefore be answered by the statement: that it rejects those principles in favor of the military virtues. This is what Mr. Rauschning must have had in mind when speaking of "*heroic* nihilism"(21).

War is a destructive business. And if war is considered more noble than peace, if war, and not peace, is considered *the* aim, the aim is for all practical purposes nothing other than destruction. There is reason for believing that the business of destroying, and killing, and torturing is a

source of an almost disinterested pleasure to the Nazis as such, that they derive a genuine pleasure from the aspect of the strong and ruthless who subjugate, exploit, and torture the weak and helpless.

10. German nihilism rejects then the principles of civilization as such in favor of war and conquest, in favor of the warlike virtues. German nihilism is therefore akin to German militarism. This compels us to raise the question what militarism is. Militarism can be identified as the view expressed by the older Moltke in these terms: "Eternal peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one."[11] To believe that eternal peace is a dream, is not militarism, but perhaps plain commonsense; it is at any rate not bound up with a particular moral taste. But to believe that eternal peace is not a ***beautiful*** dream, is tantamount to believing that war is something desirable in itself; and to believe that war is something desirable in itself, betrays a cruel, inhuman disposition. The view that war is good in itself, implies the rejection of the distinction between just and unjust wars, between wars of defense and wars of aggression. It is ultimately irreconcilable with the very idea of a law of nations.

11. German nihilism is *akin* to German militarism, but it is not *identical* with it. Militarism always made at least the *attempt* to reconcile the ideal of war with *Kultur*, nihilism however is based on the assumption that *Kultur* is finished. Militarism always recognized that the virtues of peace are of equal dignity, or almost equal dignity, with the virtues of war. When denying that the rules of decency cannot be applied to foreign policy, it never denied the validity of those rules as regards home policy or private life. It never asserted that science is essentially national; it merely asserted that the Germans happen to be the teachers of the lesser breeds. German nihilism on the other hand asserts that the military virtues, and in particular courage as the ability to bear any physical pain, the virtue of the red Indian, is the only virtue ***left*** (see Jünger's essay on pain in *Blütter and Steine*).[12] The only virtue ***left***: the implication is that we live in an age of decline, of the decline of the West, in an age of civilization as distinguished from, and opposed to culture; or in an age of mechanic society as distinguished from, and opposed to, organic community. In that condition of debasement, only the most elementary virtue, the first virtue, that virtue with which man and human society stands and falls, is capable to grow. Or, to express the same view somewhat differently: in an age of utter corruption, the only remedy possible is to destroy the edifice of corrup-

tion—"das *System*"—and to return to the uncorrupted and incorruptible *origin*, to the condition of *potential*, and not actual, culture or civilization: the characteristic virtue of that stage of merely *potential* culture or civilization, of the *state of nature*, is courage and nothing else. German nihilism is then a radicalized form of German militarism, and that radicalization is due to the fact that during the last generation the *romantic* judgment about the whole modern development, and therefore in particular about the present, has become much more generally accepted than it ever was even in nineteenth century *Germany*. By romantic judgment, I understand a judgment which is guided by the opinion that an absolutely superior order of human things existed during some period of the recorded past

12. However great the difference between German militarism and German nihilism may be: the kinship of the two aspirations is obvious. German militarism is the *father* of German nihilism. A thorough understanding of German nihilism would therefore require a thorough understanding of German militarism. Why has Germany such a particular aptitude for militarism? A few, extremely sketchy remarks must here suffice.

To explain German militarism, it is not sufficient to refer to the fact that German civilization is considerably *younger* than the civilization of the Western nations, that Germany is therefore perceivably nearer to barbarism than are the Western countries. For the civilization of the Slavonic nations is still younger than that of the Germans, and the Slavonic nations do not appear to be as militaristic as are the Germans. To discover the root of German militarism, it might be wiser to disregard the *prehistory* of German civilization, and to look at the history of German civilization itself. Germany reached the hey-day of her letters and her thought during the period from 1760 to 1830; i.e., *after* the elaboration of the ideal of *modern* civilization had been finished almost completely, and while a *revision* of that ideal, or a *reaction* to that ideal, took place. The ideal of *modern* civilization is of English and French origin; it is not of German origin. What the meaning of that ideal is, is, of course, a highly controversial question. If I am not greatly mistaken, one can define the tendency of the intellectual development which as it were exploded in the French Revolution, in the following terms: to lower the moral standards, the moral claims, which previously had been made by all responsible teachers, but to take better care than those earlier teachers had done, for the putting into practice, into political and legal practice, of the rules of human conduct. The

way in which this was most effectually achieved, was the identification of morality with an attitude of claiming one's *rights*, or with enlightened self-interest, or the reduction of honesty to the best policy; or the solution of the conflict between common interest and private interest by means of industry and trade. (The two most famous philosophers: Descartes, his *générosité*, and no justice, no duties; Locke: where there is no property, there is no justice.) Against that debasement of morality, and against the concomitant decline of a truly philosophic spirit, the thought of Germany stood up, to the lasting honor of Germany. It was however precisely this reaction to the spirit of the seventeenth and eighteenth century which laid the foundation for German militarism as far as it is an intellectual phenomenon. Opposing the identification of the morally good with the object of enlightened self-interest however enlightened, the German philosophers insisted on the *difference* between the morally good and self-interest, between the *honestum* and the *utile*; they insisted on self-*sacrifice* and self-*denial*; they insisted on it so much, that they were apt to forget the natural aim of man which is happiness; happiness and utility as well as commonsense (*Verständigkeit*) became almost bad names in German philosophy. Now, the difference between the noble and the useful, between duty and self-interest is *most* visible in the case of one virtue, courage, military virtue: the consummation of the actions of every other virtue is, or may be, *rewarded*; it actually *pays* to be just, temperate, urbane, munificent etc.; the consummation of the actions of courage, i.e. death on the field of honour, death for one's country, is *never* rewarded: it is the flower of self-sacrifice. Courage is the only unambiguously unutilitarian virtue. In defending menaced morality, i.e., nonmercenary morality, the German philosophers were tempted to overstress the dignity of military virtue, and in very important cases, in the cases of Fichte, Hegel, and Nietzsche, they succumbed to that temptation. In this and in various other ways, German philosophy created a peculiarly German tradition of contempt for commonsense and the aims of human life, as they are visualized by commonsense.

However deep the difference between German philosophy and the philosophy of the Western countries may be: German philosophy ultimately conceived of itself as a *synthesis* of the premodern ideal and the ideal of the modern period. That synthesis did not work: in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was overrun by Western positivism, the natural child of the enlightenment. Germany had been educated by her

philosophers in contempt of Western philosophy (*Je méprise Locke*, is a saying of Schelling's); she now observed that the synthesis effected by her philosophers, of the premodern ideal and the modern ideal did not work; she saw no way out except to purify German thought completely from the influence of the ideas of modern civilization, and to return to the premodern ideal. National Socialism is the most famous, because the most vulgar, example of such a return to a pre-modern ideal. On its highest level, it was a return to what may be called the preliterary stage of philosophy, presocratic philosophy. On *all* levels, the pre-modern ideal was not a *real* premodern ideal, but a premodern ideal *as interpreted* by the German idealists, i.e., interpreted with a polemic intention against the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and therefore distorted.

Of all German philosophers, and indeed of *all* philosophers, none exercised a greater influence on postwar Germany, none was more responsible for the emergence of German nihilism, than was Nietzsche. The relation of Nietzsche to the German Nazi Revolution is comparable to the relation of Rousseau to the French Revolution. That is to say: by interpreting Nietzsche in the light of the German revolution, one is very unjust to Nietzsche, but one is not *absolutely* unjust. It may not be amiss to quote one or the other passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, which are related to our subject: "That is no philosophic race, these Englishmen. Bacon represents an *attack* on the philosophic spirit as such. Hobbes, Hume and Locke are a degradation and debasement of the very concept of 'philosopher' for more than a century. *Against* Hume, Kant stood up and stood out. It was Locke, of whom Schelling was *entitled* to say *Je méprise Locke*. In the fight against English mechanist interpretation of nature [Newton], Hegel and Schopenhauer and Goethe were unanimous." "That what one calls the modern ideas, or the ideas of the 18th century, or even the French ideas, that ideal, in a word, against which the German spirit stood up with profound disgust—it is of *English* origin, there can be no doubt about that. The French have merely been the imitators and actors of those ideas, besides their best soldiers, and also, unfortunately, their first and most complete victims." (aph. 252 f.)[13] I believe that Nietzsche is substantially correct in asserting that *the* German tradition is very critical of the ideals of modern civilization, and those ideals are of *English* origin. He forgets however to add that the English almost always had the very un-German prudence and moderation not to throw out the baby with the bath, i.e.,

the prudence to conceive of the modern ideals as a reasonable adaptation of the old and eternal ideal of decency, of rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances. This taking things easy, this muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it, may have done some harm to the radicalism of English thought; but it proved to be a blessing to English life; the English never indulged in those radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent. Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal: the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counter-poison. While the English originated the modern ideal—the premodern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity, was nowhere better preserved than in Oxford and Cambridge.

The present Anglo-German war is then of symbolic significance. In defending modern civilization against German nihilism, the English are defending the eternal principles of civilization. No one can tell what will be the outcome of this war. But this much is clear beyond any doubt: by choosing Hitler for their leader in the crucial moment, in which the question of who is to exercise planetary rule became the order of the day, the Germans ceased to have any *rightful* claim to be more than a provincial nation; it is the English, and not the Germans, who *deserve* to be, and to *remain*, an *imperial* nation: for only the English, and not the Germans, have understood that in order to *deserve* to exercise imperial rule, *regere imperio populos*, one must have learned for a very long time to spare the vanquished and to crush the arrogant: *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*.[14]

14

Three Riders of the Apocalypse: Communism, Nazism, and Progressive Democracy* (1950)

AUREL KOLNAI

1

Of the three classic types of modern mass regimes, made to fit the body of emancipated Man, one—Nazism—would seem to bear no relevancy except to Germanic mankind alone, and owing to the defeat of Nazi Germany lacks practical support for the time being; another—Progressive Democracy, as I call it for want of a better name—is of manifold appearance, a world hag-ridden with a certain well-identifiable but flexible scheme of "isms" rather than an embodied "ism" proper, and in the sense again not wholly on a footing with that most genuine and powerful brand of totalitarianism which is the Marxist-Leninist one. Progressive Democracy, from which the other two have sprung, may be looked upon as too universal to form a threefold division with these, whereas Nazism may appear disqualified for such a status in view of its being too particular: too limited in space and time. Still, it is not without reason that Christian conservative—or in other words—antitotalitarian writers have again and again emphasized the essential kinship of these three "modes of life" of modern man, adding or not a description of their distinctive marks. Their emphasis may be an overemphasis, their attempt at distinctive characterization may be sketchy or shallow; for we are only too apt to lump together whatever things we dislike and to underestimate their mutual differences,

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though they were locked in a deadly fight among one another. So also the liberal would assert that Nazism and Communism are "essentially" the selfsame totalitarian "dictatorship" only painted different colors; the "democratic" Socialist, that Bolshevism is really a "reactionary" system; and he in his turn will hear from his Communist rivals that he is nothing but a "Social Fascist" or a "lackey of capitalists and imperialists." And yet, without allowing our *ressentiments* to tempt us into any of these inane simplifications, and aware from the outset that *Communism alone* represents, as it were, the fullness of the Inferno which man in the process of his self-enslavement has vowed to make unto himself for an earthly paradise, we may meaningfully consider the three-headed monster under the aspect of its unitary principle of life as well as under that of the respective contrasts between any two of the three heads or between any pair of them (taken as a unit) and the third. Nazism, indeed, which only yesterday astounded mankind with its tremendous outburst of energy and conquering appetite, is not a wholly parochial affair, nor in all certainty obsolete or irrevocably dead; Progressive Democracy, again, is neither a sheer recusancy from Communism nor perhaps merely its preparatory phase but the primal form of the "Common Man" world, instinct with an "ideology" of its own. In order even to fight Communism intelligently and effectively—which is our one paramount business of supreme urgency—we had better survey all these things, to the best of our ability, in their true proportions. I think the fittest way of procedure to establish and delimit the "three pairs" as against, respectively, the third member of the triad.

2

Nazism and Communism, as contrasted to Progressive Democracy, have in common most of their aspects, down to a great deal of concrete detail, relative to the *technique of government* along with its various mental paraphernalia and psychological accompaniment. They both imply one-part rule, severe dictatorship with deified "leaders" as personal figureheads, a regime of terror in permanence exercised by the secret police, state omnipotence encroaching upon all domains of life including the most intimate ones, the reducing of law and morality to mere functions of state power and of the government's will, the tendency to suppress such social inequality as is

not inherent in the gradation of political power proper, and lastly, the substitution for transcendent religion of political ideology and the self-worship of society as informed by an exclusive and militant will, implying a pretension on the government's part to "represent" that will entirely, taken in its massive self-identity one and indivisible. Besides these basic traits—an utterly monistic and centralistic conception of social power; terror as a constitutive element, a mainstay and a cornerstone, of government; the quasi-religious idea of a limitless self-sovereignty of man, to be made valid and guaranteed by the total sovereignty of state power—we notice certain further points of structural similarity between the two systems: extending to the more or less arbitrarily specified objects they mark out for cultic veneration or sustained hatred, to the peculiar cants and styles they impose in the realms of art, language, science, and so forth, as well as to other devices for ensuring a trance-like state of high tension, a continually whipped-up sense of privileged abnormality and a mood of taut militancy. Compared to this, Progressive Democracy, even in its most advanced and gravest forms—which are Socialist Party rule on the one hand, Americanism on the other—unmistakably clings to a kind of continuity with the normal life of society and the pluralistic landscape of interests, points of view, and accents which is inherent in the ordinary consciousness of man; particularly, perhaps, or at least most evidently so as regards the man of liberal civilization. Progressive Democracy, to be sure, is also informed by a "secular religion," with its various trappings and the sullen fanaticism attaching to it; but this false religion intrinsically connotes an element of tolerance, indetermination, and détente (as an actual state of mind here and now, not as a chiliastic promise to be redeemed after a world-wide dictatorship and a reign of terror growing beyond all limits shall have created human nature anew); indeed, it is incapable of unequivocal definition and its adepts, unable to think except in an idiom of compromise, are constitutionally precluded from enforcing an un-"constitutional" mode of life and from claiming a massive totality of uncontrolled power. That, nevertheless, the goal towards which Progressive Democracy is progressing lies in such a direction, being in fact indistinguishable from that of Communism, is true enough; yet "Progress," according to our Western coinage of its idolatry, is conceived of as an "infinite" one, never to be accomplished definitively, and with its tangible fruits of safety, welfare, peace, freedom, "culture," and the like being gathered, consumed, and

enjoyed by all of us daily; hence the driving force that makes *our* world go round cannot take body in one omnipotent center of power but remains subject, so far as its actual workings are concerned, to the empirical tests of success and immediate pleasure: to a network of checks and balances, that is, which affords the plain man and even the Christian with some opportunity of making his weight felt. The world of Progressive Democracy, then, is ordered on a dualist and "idealistic" plan, which implies the recognition of a "given" human reality underneath the "ideal," subsisting in its own right and incurably falling short of the "perfection" of utopia it is expected to "approximate" in time, with the division between the two remaining ineliminable; that this world, *so long as it would last*, should never be completely determined by its dominant ideology is part of the ideology itself.

Communism and Nazism, on the other hand, both presuppose the antecedent of Progressive Democracy, from which they both represent a radical new departure, directed to entirely disparate or even antithetic aims but revealing a far-reaching analogy between the two as regards the totalitarian conception of "identity" between the wills of the rulers and the ruled, the long-range program of terroristic dictatorship, and the ingenious idea—thought up in response to the growing sense of emptiness, nihilism, and palsy in liberal society—of a new "meaning of life" provided and imposed by state power.

3

What Nazism and Progressive Democracy have in common is, to put it briefly, the character of *incomplete totalitarianism*. So far as ideological "signs" and "emphases" alone are concerned it would seem, admittedly, that our democratic regimes are not totalitarian at all, whereas Nazism is most noisily and defiantly so, connoting Socialism too and insisting on state omnipotence not a whit less than does Communism. Again, if instead of judging by the sound of party slogans and the demeanor of terroristic gangsters drunk with power we consider the "insidious" totalitarianism inherent in the trend towards equality, uniformity and administrative "planning for welfare," we might on the contrary find that Progressive Democracy really outstrips the totalitarianism not only of the Nazis but

even of the Communists, assimilating as it does (under the deceptive verbal cloak of liberalism and tolerance) the thinking, moods, and wills of everybody to a wholesale standard of the "socialized" mind more organically and perhaps more durably; eliminating all *essential* opposition to its own pattern by incomparably milder methods but so much the more effectively and irrevocably. However, both these perspectives, though highly relevant to a full assessment of the objects of our study, are one-sided and liable to make us miss the central point of distinction. Neither our horror of Nazi perversity, cruelty, and vulgarity nor our disgust at the mediocrity and duplicity, the inner unfreedom, the deadening quack rationality and the sickening pseudoculture of Progressive Democracy should blind us to the patent and highly important truth that, in contraposition to the Communist regime bent on determining the whole of human reality according to the pattern of an unnatural utopia and reducing every aspect and detail of men's lives to a function of One all-absorbing political Will, both Nazism and Progressive Democracy represent the maimed forms of normal human society, not integrally suppressed but, respectively, overlaid with a fiendish tyranny totalitarian in temper, and infiltrated by the virus of subversive utopia bound for a totalitarian goal. As regards Progressive Democracy, its essentially curtailed totalitarianism is too obvious to need elaborate treatment. Notwithstanding the subtle expansion of the old concept of political liberty into that of "Freedom from Want" and the surreptitious displacement of citizens' rights by the changeling idol of a "right to security," the elements of the "rights of man" and "the dignity of the individual" cannot be wholly ousted from Progressive Democracy short of a radical overthrow of the system: until that, the bar to keep out tyranny proper continues acting, though there is no denying that the inward logic of the system makes it wear ever thinner and threatens to eat it away altogether. Still, how could a conservative writer call the democratic regime properly tyrannical or actually totalitarian, so long as he is able to get his very accusations into print?—and without on that score coming to immediate and crushing grief, into the bargain!

To deny a genuinely totalitarian character to Nazism may sound a little odder, seeing that not only liberal-democratic but also conservative and Christian authors have betrayed a fondness for arguing glibly from Communism to Nazism and conversely, interpreting Nazism as a "Brown" variety of its "Red" model and Bolshevism as nationalism or imperialism

under a Red flag, overworking the term "National Socialism," harping on the disciplinarian and allegedly "nationalistic" traits in Russian Bolshevism, subsuming the two evil things under an identical concept of "Neo-Paganism" and placing the Nazi worship of a "superior race" on a level with the Marxian deity, absolutely different as to its logical structure and historical meaning, of the "class struggle." The truth is that the Nazi order never was, nor was intended to be, a *socialistic* one—in the proper, collectivist sense of that term—and for that reason alone, which is far from being the deepest, could not amount and could never have attained to true totalitarianism. Despite the terrorism of Nazi dictatorship which bore down severely on the noble and wealthy classes as well as on the broad masses (thus connoting, as it were, a kind of new equalitarianism), it was utterly alien to the Nazi conception of society to do away with class distinctions; despite the enmity it had sworn to the "Jewish moneylender," Nazism reserved a high place of honor to the "German entrepreneur"; despite its playing ducks and drakes with the economy of the country and countries it had subjugated, Nazism would not dream of effecting incisive structural changes in the economic system, let alone of seeking them for their own sake; despite its wallowing in the ecstasy of "total state power," Nazism was definitely and consistently hostile to the idea of reducing all social relations of power and dependence to a mere function or expression of that state power, and in fact ultimately aimed at creating a new type of social aristocracy. To be sure, Nazi tyranny was "unlimited" in the sense that it kicked aside constitutional "checks and balances" and even moral restraints just as scornfully as did Bolshevism, but not at all in the sense of claiming, as Bolshevism does claim, a total determination of the order of human life and relationships on behalf of one exclusive political will as actualized by the rulers; to be sure, it ruthlessly trampled under foot all "opposition" but it did not define from the outset everything not of its own making as "opposition"; to be sure, it would order about capitalists perhaps as harshly as workers, but without for a moment entertaining the idea of *"liquidating"* the capitalist class (or, for that matter, the peasantry) and of manufacturing society anew as homogeneous mass of "toilers." It should be added that, if Nazi tyranny was explicitly oppressive and (unlike the old absolutisms at their worst) positively totalitarian in the educational, literary, artistic, and similar fields, the intellectual life of Germany under its heel—and of occupied France as well—still compared as

a paradise of freedom and spontaneity with the spiritual cemetery which promptly covers every place where the Bolshevik steam-roller has passed. Could any one imagine, in Soviet Russia or one of her dependences a counterpart to Jünger's *Marble Cliffs*: a nauseating and at the same time wholly unambiguous vision of Stalin as the incarnation of malicious barbarism, published with impunity—or only published; or, indeed, only written—by, say, a Menshevik university professor or an anarchist prince of yesterday, disillusioned with the revolution?

In some respects Progressive Democracy, and in another but not entirely different sense Nazism, might be described as more "progressive," "modern" and "totalitarian" than Communism. Democratic thought is more anxious to be up-to-date and elastic; to scan, to recognize, and to put to the test—rather than merely prescribe and enforce—the new states of mind rising, in society, in a kind of perpetual flux; to effect not only but to undergo a constant change, absorbing as it were all aspects of a "world in change" into the very tissue of its own details and formulations. Nazism, in its turn, views man, his nature and history, in a perspective admitting of a greater manifoldness of dimensions, and thus aspires to a totalitarian determination of man by state power through more numerous channels; through more complex leverage. Biological and eugenic points of view seem to rank higher, not only in Nazi racialism but also in the Progressive Democratic trend towards a medical and psychiatric dictatorship, than in the Communist state-worship with its monomaniac reference to political power and social (in the sense of extra-political) equality. Thus Communism cares less, one might say, about an all-round predetermination of the "human material," including its *natural quality*, on which Society as represented by its central agency of power expects to work. But, on the other hand, all such lines of determination are of a more partial, haphazard, experimental, uncertain kind than is the direct bending of men's wills by an unrestrained and effectively organized power of command; moreover, they leave some space for categories of value—specifications of "good and bad"—not defined in terms of present governmental decision as such: for measures of judgment that lie beyond the one and indivisible political will of man. Communism, then, remains the absolute, classic, and insuperable type of totalitarianism proper.

4

Progressive Democracy and Communism are aligned together as the working out of the *selfsame basic concept of Social Revolution*, whereas Nazism essentially aims at bringing about a Counter-Revolution; a reversal of the trend which White mankind has followed ever since the first steps towards the secularization of Christianity (or, to be more exact, since the adoption of Christianity), and which has led up, itself coming to be more and more consciously experienced in the process and doted upon as "the meaning of history," to the various forms of present modernity. The two first-named "isms" coincide in "*Leftism*"; their Nazi counterpart, however unpleasant this may sound to many conservative ears, embodies one extreme (or, rather extremist) type of "*Rightism*." However, "Right and Left" is a highly important but by no means an overwhelmingly sovereign division or test: one may be a Rightist yet an enemy of Nazism just as well as one may be a Left-wing democrat yet rigidly opposed to Communism, or again, an orthodox Communist who by definition is ready to suppress whatever other kinds of Leftists walk abroad; one may certainly be, as I am, a confirmed Rightist who yet prefers Democracy at its worst to Nazism. What is more, I even prefer the drab but comparatively solid commonplace advocates of the liberal-democratic "middle road" to the flippant aesthetes of conservatism who despise "trivial" facts and obvious "truisms" for their lack of piquancy, twist the truth so as to fit the ideological need of the moment, and reel in skin-deep "depths" such as the analogy between "National Socialism" and Communist imperialism or the violent moods and the patterns of action Nazism had in common with its so-called "Red twin-brother"—labeling, on their strength, Nazism as a "brand Leftism," while the pundits of Labourism and Yankeesism no less libelously tag the terrible epithet "reactionary" to their unloving brothers of Moscow.

This has been the primary, manifest, consistent, and permanent principle, the set purpose, of Nazism—as, indeed, of all "Fascism," with which Nazism is partly identical but which it transcends *essentially*; to save the national society from annihilation by the Bolshevists and from Socialist ascendancy; to destroy the Marxian and all independent (including the Christian) labor movement[s] in the world of capitalist economy; to abolish the liberal and democratic framework of bourgeois society itself,

which provides Socialist subversion with a thriving-ground and thus dialectically invites its own destruction; reaching out into a vaster historical perspective, to undo the work of the French Revolution, together with the mental atmosphere of rationalism, enlightenment, and progress which bred forth that revolution and again drew new strength from its impetus and achievements; to turn back to, and to revive, autochthonous national traditions, with more stress laid on their political exploitation than on their historic genuineness and therefore a tendency to interpret them in a narrow, aggressive, as it were "tribal" and deliberately mythical sense. True Fascism—that is Mussolini's: the only one that existed—went further along this path than the improperly "Fascist" Right dictatorships—Dollfuss's,* Salazar's,† Franco's‡ and others—and for this reason, being more activistic, more aggressive, more overheatedly "political," more reckless, more totalitarian, more antiliberal, might *so far* be found more antibourgeois, "subversive" and "revolutionary." Nazism again went further; but this time with a decisively greater stride and broader scope, in a unique and incomparable style: negating, over and above liberalism and rationalism, Christian civilization as such (the breeding ground of modernity and progress) as well as the faith which has informed it, together with some if not most of its subsoil in Greco-Roman antiquity; and groping back, in its quest for "rejuvenating" antimodern traditions, across the Prussian glory of yesterday and the more brutal aspects of the German Middle Ages towards the barbarous world of Teutonic heathendom—not without a side-glance, in my opinion at any rate, at Hindu racialism and caste religion. Call, then, Nazism extremistic and totalitarian; call it an archenemy of conservatism proper; call it, if you like, subversive or revolutionary, provided you are clear in your mind what you mean by that: a revolutionist's state of mind, to be sure, afire with the ambitious vision of a vast and

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* Engelbert Dollfuss was an Austrian politician. Appointed Chancellor in 1933, he allied Austria with Horthy's Hungary and Mussolini's Italy, but opposed the Anschluss with Germany. He was assassinated by Austrian Nazis in July 1934.

† António de Oliveira Salazar became premier of Portugal in 1932 and promptly assumed dictatorial powers and moved the country toward Fascism.

‡ Francisco Franco was proclaimed the head of state in Spain at the conclusion of the civil war in 1939. He led Spain on the model of Mussolini's Italy for many years utilizing a single political party, the Falange.

perhaps measureless transformation of society; dynamic, petulant, savage, uninhibited, in many a sense not unlike Bolshevism—but setting out in an opposite direction. No sharper contrast could be thought of than the one between the historical locus of Bolshevism and that of Nazism; the concept of history as a dialectical process ordained to the goal of a man-made "rational" utopia, and the paganistic idea of restoring history to its place as an aspect of natural "becoming," a "cosmic wave" of vital ups and downs, an aimless clash and interplay of irrational forces with man as their mere emanation, product, and sport, whose only task is to acknowledge his status as such and to make the most of it by submitting to the mysterious imperatives of that immutable order of everlasting change as reechoed in the "throbbing of this blood," Communism take action so as to bring progress to a head: to institute the world-wide reign of Antichrist—which explicitly presupposes the historical lineage marked by the names of Jahweh, Christ, Luther and Calvin, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte and Hegel—embodied in mankind wholly organized on a unitary plan and wholly master of itself, that is, wholly slave to its center of will. But Nazism would subvert, as it were, the tradition of subversion; break off the beaten track of history and scorn the path of progress struck out by an intelligible formula of the human mind engaged in its dialectical self-creation; though aware of its unavoidable heirship to Christianity also to mass democracy, it would in the final reckoning "cut out" the Christian "episode" altogether and revert to a state of things in which the old daemons dwelling in the hearts and governing the fates of men should again come into their own.

The very immensity of a "counterrevolution on a cosmic scale" as envisioned in Nazism cannot but imply a certain "revolutionary" note peculiar to it, with an emphasis stronger than that of the Communists on the abstract elements of "newness," "youth," "reversal" (*Umbruch*) and similar such notions. Whereas, in the Communist optics, Christianity and feudalism appear to represent a historical "progress" over Paganism and slave economy, the Nazi writers, steeped in a mood of unreal but not wholly irrelevant wistfulness for "Teutonic religion," were fond of vilifying Charlemagne, whom they used to call "Charles the Butcher." But the German *völkish* (ethnic or racialist) conservatives had already indulged in such whims long before the advent of Nazism. From the moment of its birth up to the time when it achieved the uprooting of all the Left-

ist and "Centrist" forces in Germany, the Nazi movement was developing and maneuvering in constant and organic co-operation—never felt by anybody to be "paradoxical" or "treacherous"—with parties and social groups of the "right." It cannot be mere coincidence nor a matter of mere trickery that von Kahr* should have patronized and encouraged Hitler in 1923 before "betraying" him; that von Papen† and Hugenberg‡ should have prevailed over Hindenburg§ to appoint Hitler chancellor; that Hitler should have started his rule by dissolving the Communist Party and calling Parliament in Potsdam; that he should have obtained full powers from his Rightist allies and the Catholic Center itself over the opposition of the Socialists, to be dissolved in their turn forthwith; that even at the time of his collaboration with Moscow, he should have persistently tried to use Pétain,¶ Franco, Horthy,** Antonescu†† and Mussolini as lieutenants in his campaign against the democracies; that it should have been the conservatives in England (backed by most of the French Right) who endeavored to

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* Gustav Ritter von Kahr was a powerful conservative, monarchist politician in Bavaria during the 1920s. He fostered a movement for Bavarian secession in defiance of the Weimar government but without success. He helped to suppress Hitler's attempted putsch in November of 1923 and was later murdered by the Nazis in the 1934 Night of the Light Knives.

† von Papen. See note on page 193.

‡ Alfred Hugenberg was a German politician, industrialist, and media mogul who exercised great influence with German public opinion through his newspapers. As a leader of the conservative German National People's Party, he sought to control Hitler by making alliances between the Nazis and his party, only to be outwitted and cast aside.

§ Paul von Hindenburg was a key German military leader during the first world war who was elected president in 1925. He was reelected to that office in 1932, and appointed Adolph Hitler Chancellor in 1933.

¶ Henri Philippe Pétain was a French military hero of WWI. He became head of the Vichy government of occupied France during WWII. He was tried and found guilty of treason after the war.

** Miklós Horthy led a counterrevolution against Bela Kun and the Hungarian Communists in 1920. Horthy ruled Hungary during the interwar years. Horthy and Hungary entered WWII on the side of Nazi Germany, though he maintained ties with the Allies. Horthy unsuccessfully sued for a separate peace with the Soviet Union in 1944.

†† Ion Antonescu was a Romanian dictator during WWII who allied his country with Nazi Germany.

come to an agreement with Hitler up to his conquest of Prague and the relatively Rightist or at least strongly capitalistic circles in America who were busy hindering Roosevelt from opposing Nazi Germany up to Pearl Harbor. To try and discredit Nazism (or else, the Left) by calling it a brand of Leftism is just as absurd as it would be to apply the same epithet to Fascists and Falangists* as well as to all liberals, conservatives and Christian democrats or Catholic People's Parties of the present epoch, seeing that all these represent political forces acting on a mass scale in an "age of the masses." "Leftist" would then be a synonym of the political man as such; "Rightist" a word to designate the solitary thinker with an anarchical turn of mind and a scorn of collective discipline, whatever the content of his ideas may be. Such an utter misuse of current terminology is incompatible with any purposeful political thought, and indeed with intellectual seriousness and honesty.

"We fight the Nazis because we have to; the Socialists are the enemy we fight cheerfully, with joy in our hearts"—thus spoke, in the summer of 1933, Major Fey, a "Rightist" halfway between Fascist and Monarchist, Minister for Public Security under Chancellor Dollfuss in Austria. It is with an even more pitifully bleeding heart than Fey when at war with Rightist "hotspurs" that English Labourites and the like see themselves compelled to take a stand against Soviet Russia, "the greatest hope of the international workers' movement." Nor is the secret of why President Roosevelt offered the Russian Bolsheviks half the world on a silver tray anything other than the simple fact that he loved them; that his heart went out to them as instinctively as he distrusted the English "Tories" whom he was reared, fashioned and taught to regard as the hereditary and natural antagonist. The man of Progressive Democracy is loath to understand that the Communist is not only "also a Leftist" but a *totalitarian* Leftist, who is resolved to devour him lock, stock, and barrel after he has ceased to be useful and "preferable for the moment" or "comparatively progressive." But at a certain juncture, the instinct of self-preservation may prevail in the man of Progressive Democracy; he will then willy-nilly resist the onslaught of the Communist and, to justify this depressing necessity in his own malformed conscience, come to discover that

* The Falange was founded in 1933 and was the party that dominated Spain under the rule of Franco.

Communism is not really a luminous beacon for the workers of the world but a "reactionary" dictatorship and a reedition of "Tsarism." The typical "rightist" attitude towards Nazism has been closely analogous to this. But, as we shall see, it is easier for a Conservative than for a Progressive thinker to avoid this pitfall; for to be "a Rightist above all"—rather than to measure all political questions by objective moral and religious standards—is itself a mood copied from the Left.

5

The "Riders of the Apocalypse" are nothing but three classic postures, three epiphanies as it were, of *Man at large*: Man first set free from Christianity and lifted above the flats of his fallen nature; Man who then wrenched himself free *from* Christianity and construed the automatic workings of his fallen nature into a mirage of self-made heaven; finally, Man impatiently bent on converting that mirage into a cast-iron reality and thereby stultifying it so as to become in his turn, more than ever before, a house divided in itself, though still afire with the unholy rage of his emancipation and sovereignty.

Our appreciation—from a Christian conservative point of view—of the three great hostile powers of this *saeculum* will, however, differ both in degree and, particularly, in kind. In Communism, the pure embodiment of subversive totalitarianism, we shall see our foe most entirely and unequivocally; in Progressive Democracy, least so. For, although or just because Progressive Democracy enfolds the historical "Left" in its broad and wholesale sense, it also represents in a backwater fashion the obscured, silenced, disfigured, and disinherited remains of true Christian civilization with its timeless standards of right, honor, and wisdom: the precariously surviving body of Christendom in a scene resounding with the slogans of Antichrist; a scant but precious heirloom of common decency and common sense overshadowed by the witless romanticism of its exact opposite—the cult of the Common Man. But nonetheless do we owe a debt of gratitude to the totalitarianisms proper, Communism and Nazism, for being *witnesses* to the truth that the idol of the Common Man cannot indefinitely reign without ruling beyond all restraining and absorbing everything into its hideous texture; for having *exploded* the

lying prophecies and fond hopes clustered round the idea of progress and the myths of "social science" about an approaching golden age of sweet silliness and meaningless abundance. This has been and is being done by Communism, itself a victim of the giant imposture of Enlightenment, far more powerfully and definitively than by Nazism. Again, to Nazism we must assign the peculiar merit of having sounded, for once, though in as false a key and with as strident overtones as it possibly could, the bugle-call for a radical revulsion from the sleepwalkers path of progress and thus broken the spell more sharply—in a more direct and positive sense—than Communism, whose infinitely greater terrors are still sweetened by the psychological credentials of a vision, false and self-contradictory as it is, of "ultimate" peace and welfare. But Nazism, with its abstract worship (alien from modernity and Communism) of wickedness, cruelty and deceit for their own sake, with its *en bloc* rejection of the Christian past as a corruptive and lethal blind alley in the life of the race, with its reading of history (no less dogmatic and arbitrary than are the creeds of progress) as a "dynamic" but aimless sequence of biological cycles of blossoming, thriving and decay, with its self-duping trust in the limitless power of human unreason and its calculated underbidding of the progressive cheapjacks in the field of mob-mastery, is scarcely less tainted than are its rivals by the spirit of unnatural utopia and the hypnosis of the "situation" and "opportunity" as present at a given point in the dialectical course of the "age of masses." In opposing the mutilated and debased post-Christianity of Progressive Democracy by its forceful but wholly artificial and unreal evocation of a phantom of inferior paganism (unmistakably doctored in the image of the devil of Christianity), it reveals the character of an "extreme Right" which is anything but conservative; in substituting for the sanctification of the will of Man by Rousseau and—in a more concrete, determined and effective fashion—by Marxian Communism the more modest and less blasphemous but all the more irrational and willful sanctification of one particular human "We" or center of power, it offers in the place of the Leftist misconception of order, not any elements of a true order but the mere lust of disorder.

Nazism, then, has shown—as have also done, less impressively but perhaps more conclusively and fruitfully, the less ambitious but sounder contemporary attempts to ward off the Bolshevist menace, at least on a local scale and for a while, by a Rightist emergency dictatorship cleared of

the biases of Progressive Democracy—that powerful spiritual and popular forces *can* be stirred up and made effective against alleged fatality of a historical "logic" by which mankind must drive itself, as a final and total "solution" of its equation into the pen of the Red slaveholders. But Nazism, devoid of patience and wisdom, bent on prompt success, and mesmerized with the idea of taking mankind on the rebound, borrowed its soul from that very experience of an unstable historical situation calling for "activism" and evoking a trance of "dynamism," whose progressive and revolutionary meaning it irrationalized into the sublimely meaningless concept of a "crisis in permanence": the hour of great deeds, the cosmic walpurgis night, its own law and purpose and the object of a morbid mystical worship. In its very negation of the alleged meaning of history as a progressive self-creation of omnipotent human Reason and Will, the Nazi mind kept enslaved to the suasion of the "historical situation" as a supreme political principle and the sovereignty of one human group-will over and above the timeless moral order which genuine conservative statecraft recognizes as the irremovable measure of its designs and acts, discarding it along with the pet concept of Leftism like progress, planning or universal education, as though it too were nothing but a presumptuous and licentious fabrication of human reason. If Leftism means the preposterous endeavor to abolish contingency and man's dependence on an order of things he cannot fathom and an order of right and wrong he can discern but not decree or improve upon, the endeavor in a word to subject all things that affect his condition to a human counterfeit of Providence, the adventurers of Nazism would jump to the opposite "extreme" of erecting brute contingency itself into an all-embracing rule of the universe with nothing beyond it, under which the political agent that "happens to be strongest" may, and is called to, assume an unregulated and irresponsible pragmatic mastery over all men, societies, and domains of life he can bring within his range of power. Though undoubtedly a form of anti-Leftism, this "extreme" Rightism by the same token is an *eccentric* Rightism, which cannot but miss entirely, shooting past it as it were, the vital center of conservative thought: the respect of that which is, *including* its order, manifoldness and various gradations, and therefore also the duty of men and of rulers to use their intelligence, to administer things and effect reforms prudently and in awareness of their limitations, to exercise their freedom of choice in the framework of moral standards not issued from that freedom, to wield

power in keeping with rather than in violation of alien spheres of will or traditions of power, to contribute to the shaping of human reality in a state of mind responsible to God the Creator and Legislator (and *therefore* and *inasmuch* also to their fellow man affected by their actions); in other words, in a spirit of *intrinsic* and not merely of tactical moderation. Thus, again, Nazism represents by no means the only Right-tinged political initiative or trend of thought that has pitifully fallen short of essential conservatism. There are many more forms, and less easy to array in a neat order of subdivisions, of "rightism" than of "Leftism," because the Leftist mind is committed to the historically given "trend of progress" as ushered in by the Renaissance "emancipation of Man" and modeled by its successive upshoots, whereas Rightist thought, so far as it outsteps the limits of mere retardation, expediency, or formal traditionalism and to concepts of restoration, may (or, rather, must) choose its actual pivots of orientation and work out its structure of preferences with a broad margin of freedom. The Left expresses the mind of man as a fellow-traveler and interpreter of the movement of the "world spirit" towards the goal of their fusion into one and man's becoming his own universal providence; the Right typifies man's submission to an unchangeable superior order and for that very reason, once it comes to the marking out of his concrete objects as an agent, his consciousness and love of being embedded in a motley world of contingency. That is why, as I hinted earlier, the conservative is better able to disavow and repudiate Nazism, notwithstanding its Rightist sign, than a Leftist to disclaim affinity with anything that smacks of Leftism, but especially of a Leftism more advanced than his own (*"Pas d'ennemis à gauche!"*) and therefore in a significant sense foreshadowing his own motion towards his "truer self."

Here is, in addition to the irremediable absence of effective rulership and the no less organic disease of pacifism, a most essential source of weakness hampering the efforts of Progressive Democracy to parry the menace of Communism. "Fifth columns," "diabolically clever propaganda," and the misuse of liberty by its enemies, are scarcely more than embodied reflections and obvious consequences of the basic fact that Progressive Democracy in its most intimate nerve-centers cannot help being vulnerable to the charms, monstrous though they may seem to its own upper-floor consciousness, of its more "integrated" rival, whose apocalyptic rush it has both set on foot and timidly tried to imitate—both stimulated and

lamely attempted to curb—but is unable either to outpace or to *mean* to stop earnestly at the risk of bringing its own movement to a halt and thus perhaps putting an end to the whole nightmare of modernity.

6

Progressive Democracy is, then, neither a spiritually acceptable choice in the teeth of Bolshevism (being too much kin to the foe precisely as regards its innermost substance) nor a safe rampart against the danger (being "dialectically" subject to its attraction). Conservative thought—and, should it exist or were it to rise again, a conservative policy underlain by such thought—must neither identify itself with the principles, habits and fashions of Progressive Democracy, melting as it were into a Right-wing shade thereof; nor forcedly interpret Progressive Democracy in its own likeness; nor even, withdrawing on its part into the secret chambers of a "small elite's" mental inwardness, simply and cheerfully entrust the practical defense of Civilization against Bolshevism to the forces of Progressive Democracy. If only to fight Bolshevism with the utmost rigor and the bitterest determination, with all resources of the mind and the heart human nature can muster, something more unlike Bolshevism and more deeply opposed to it than democracy is required. However, no less a blunder is it for conservatives to observe an attitude of neutrality in the struggle between democracy and Bolshevism, because both are of the Left; as if, for that reason, their fight (wherever democracy puts up a fight, that is) were unreal or its outcome irrelevant to Civilization (and accordingly, to the chances of conservatism). A kindred blunder conservatives may be tempted to commit is that of "unconditional Rightism"; the vice practiced, from the middle of the 1920s well into the middle of the 1930s, by most of them in the central Europe—with consequences I need not stress at length. It can be hardly our ambition to conjure up the ghost of Nazism, were that practicable; nor, generally speaking, to breed or to set loose a fourth rider of the Apocalypse.

It is unworthy of conservatives, indeed a betrayal of the mode of life they stand for, to indulge in any postures of all-round "radicalism," crisis-mongering, or voluptuous visions of a *grand soir* or "twilight of the gods": of a universal catastrophe leaving behind an empty field of ruins, so that

kings, nobles and priests may rise again comfortably from the midst of the debris and start building the world anew in the void space. To be sure, the onerous, distasteful, and lopsided partnership—a leonine contract, as it were, to our disadvantage—we may at present alone maintain with Progressive Democracy cannot constitute our final aim; but that does not mean that we should submit to such co-operation with dishonest intentions modeled on the totalitarian cheat of Communist "Popular Front" tactics. To turn on our partner directly after our common enemy has collapsed in order to destroy him likewise is an idea as utterly unconservative as that of establishing a uniformly "Rightist" system of power all over the earth. Although a universal *reference* may properly belong to all serious politics (and particularly so in the present state of communications and interdependence), any world-political "plan" is strictly incompatible with a conservative outlook no matter how "Rightist" the intention in which it be conceived; for all susceptibility to the magic of the "clean sheet" and of "extirpating the evil with the root" or "curing the disease of Civilization by destroying its ultimate causes" is a stigma of the subversive and totalitarian mind bent on tampering with the divine governance of human history and averse to the proper business of man: that of doing what is right—though with an eye on foreseeable consequences and in an intelligent framework of limited perspectives—and entrusting the fruits of his action to providence. A "streamlined" Christian "blueprint" for the construction of the "City of Man," notwithstanding the gilded lettering in honor of God that may be meant to adorn its portals, cannot be Christian except in name; an anaemic ghost of modernity unsuccessfully and unpleasantly trying to outvie its fullblooded daemons. Again, such political thought alone is truly conservative as seeks above all to "conserve," and in the second place to supplement and to perfect as well as to disengage and to revive the existing good rather than to "create" the good out of naught of an a priori scheme embellished with an arbitrary muddle of romantic reminiscences.

According to its dominant signature, its characteristic edge, the mechanism of its march and the appetite of its idols, Progressive Democracy is indeed *the* Rider of the modern Apocalypse rather than merely one among the others, seeing that has sired the rest. But materially, it contains and shelters, it has devalued and impoverished, yet so far guarded against utter peril and extinction, the traditions of civilization and fragments of

liberty—the shreds of morality and cells of Christian tissue—which its violent and all-round destruction by *any* opposing force would wipe out, beyond repair, along with the species of evil that forms its more vigorous and more showy reality. Christian conservatives cannot, therefore, aim at anything better than helping and stimulating all anti-Communist action Progressive Democracy may be capable and willing to undertake, though with a full inward detachment and sovereign aloofness from its genius, doctrines, habits, and interests as such, and seeking at the same time (in a spirit of healthy empiricism) to encourage and support the genuinely traditionalist centers of power and types of society—such as, for instance, Spain—which are likely to play an invaluable part both in bolstering the anti-Communist front and in counterbalancing the world supremacy of Progressive Democracy, circumscribing its range of influence and breaking its totalitarian monopoly after the downfall of Communism.

19

The Pill of Murti-Bing* (1953)

CZESLAW MILOSZ

It was only toward the middle of the twentieth century that the inhabitants of many European countries came, in general unpleasantly, to the realization that their fate could be influenced directly by intricate and abstruse books of philosophy. Their bread, their work, their private lives began to depend on this or that decision in disputes on principles to which, until then, they had never paid any attention. In their eyes, the philosopher had always been a sort of dreamer whose divagations had no effect on reality. The average human being, even if he had once been exposed to it, wrote philosophy off as utterly impractical and useless. Therefore the great intellectual work of the Marxists could easily pass as just one more variation on a sterile pastime. Only a few individuals understood the causes and probable consequences of this general indifference.

A curious book appeared in Warsaw in 1932. It was a novel, in two volumes, entitled *Insatiability.* Its author was Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, a painter, writer, and philosopher, who had constructed a philosophical system akin to the monadology of Leibnitz.** As in his earlier novel, *Farewell to Autumn,* his language was difficult, full of neologisms. Brutal descriptions of erotic scenes alternated with whole pages of

* This is the first chapter of Milosz's classic work, *The Captive Mind* (1953).

** Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1648–1716) was a German mathematician and philosopher.

discussions on Husserl,* Carnap,† and other contemporary philosophers. Besides, one could not always tell whether the author was serious or joking; and the subject matter seemed to be pure fantasy.

The action of the book took place in Europe, more precisely in Poland, at some time in the near future or even in the present, that is, in the thirties, forties, or fifties. The social group it portrayed was that of musicians, painters, philosophers, aristocrats, and higher-ranking military officers. The whole book was nothing but a study of decay: mad, dissonant music; erotic perversion; widespread use of narcotics; dispossessed thinking; false conversions to Catholicism; and complex psychopathic personalities. This decadence reigned at a time when western civilization was said to be threatened by an army from the East, a Sino-Mongolian army that dominated all the territory stretching from the Pacific to the Baltic.

Witkiewicz's heroes are unhappy in that they have no faith and no sense of meaning in their work. This atmosphere of decay and senselessness extends throughout the entire country. And at that moment, a great number of hawkers appear in the cities peddling Murti-Bing pills. Murti-Bing was a Mongolian philosopher who had succeeded in producing an organic means of transporting a "philosophy of life." This Murti-Bing "philosophy of life," which constituted the strength of the Sino-Mongolian army, was contained in pills in an extremely condensed form. A man who used these pills changed completely. He became serene and happy. The problems he had struggled with until then suddenly appeared to be superficial and unimportant. He smiled indulgently at those who continued to worry about them. Most affected were all questions pertaining to unsolvable ontological difficulties. A man who swallowed Murti-Bing pills became impervious to any metaphysical concerns. The excesses into which art falls when people vainly seek in form the wherewithal to appease their spiritual hunger were but outmoded stupidities for him. He no longer considered the approach of the Sino-Mongolian army as a tragedy for his own civilization. He lived in the midst of his compatriots like a

* Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, best known as the founder of a philosophical school called "phenomenology."

† Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) was a German-born philosopher and a major exponent of a philosophical school called "logical positivism."

healthy individual surrounded by madmen. More and more people took the Murti-Bing cure, and their resultant calm contrasted sharply with the nervousness of their environment.

The epilogue, in a few words: the outbreak of the war led to a meeting of the armies of the West with those of the East. In the decisive moment, just before the great battle, the leader of the Western army surrendered to the enemy; and in exchange, though with the greatest honors, he was beheaded. The Eastern army occupied the country and the new life, that of Murti-Bingism, began. The heroes of the novel, once tormented by philosophical "insatiety," now entered the service of the new society. Instead of writing the dissonant music of former days, they composed marches and odes. Instead of painting abstractions as before, they turned out socially useful pictures. But since they could not rid themselves completely of their former personalities, they became schizophrenics.

So much for the novel. Its author often expressed his belief that religion, philosophy, and art are living out their last days. Yet he found life without them worthless. On September 17, 1939, learning that the Red Army had crossed the eastern border of Poland, he committed suicide by taking veronal and cutting his wrists.

Today, Witkiewicz's vision is being fulfilled in the minutest detail throughout a large part of the European continent. Perhaps sunlight, the smell of the earth, little everyday pleasures, and the forgetfulness that work brings can ease somewhat the tensions created by this process of fulfillment. But beneath the activity and bustle of daily life is the constant awareness of an irrevocable choice to be made. One must either die (physically or spiritually), or else one must be reborn according to a prescribed method, namely, the taking of Murti-Bing pills. People in the West are often inclined to consider the lot of converted countries in terms of might and coercion. That is wrong. There is an internal longing for harmony and happiness that lies deeper than ordinary fear or the desire to escape misery or physical destruction. The fate of completely consistent, nondialectical people like Witkiewicz is a warning for many an intellectual. All about him, in the city streets, he sees the frightening shadows of internal exiles, irreconcilable, nonparticipating, eroded by hatred.

In order to understand the situation of a writer in a people's democracy, one must seek the reasons for his activity and ask how he maintains his equilibrium. Whatever one may say, the New Faith affords

great possibilities for an active and positive life. And Murti-Bing is more tempting to an intellectual than to a peasant or laborer. For the intellectual, the New Faith is a candle that he circles like a moth. In the end, he throws himself into the flame for the glory of mankind. We must not treat this desire for self-immolation lightly. Blood flowed freely in Europe during the religious wars, and he who joins the New Faith today is paying off a debt to that European tradition. We are concerned here with questions more significant than mere force.

I shall try to grasp those profound human longings and to speak about them as if one really could analyze what is the warm blood and the flesh, itself, of man. If I should try to describe the reasons why a man becomes a revolutionary I would be neither eloquent nor restrained enough. I admit that I have too much admiration for those who fight evil, whether their choice of ends and means be right or wrong. I draw the line, however, at those intellectuals who *adapt* themselves, although the fact that they are adapted and not genuine revolutionaries in no way diminishes their newly acquired zeal and enthusiasm.

There are, I believe, a few key concepts which may lead us to understand why they accept Murti-Bing.

THE VOID

The society portrayed by Witkiewicz is distinguished by the fact that in it religion has ceased to exist as a force. And it is true that religion long ago lost its hold on men's minds not only in the people's democracies, but elsewhere as well. As long as a society's best minds were occupied by theological questions, it was possible to speak of a given religion as the way of thinking of the whole social organism. All the matters which most actively concerned the people were referred to it and discussed in its terms. But that belongs to a dying era. We have come by easy stages to a lack of a common system of thought that could unite the peasant cutting his hay, the student poring over formal logic, and the mechanic working in an automobile factory. Out of this lack arises the painful sense of detachment or abstraction that oppresses the "creators of culture." Religion has been replaced by philosophy which, however, has strayed into spheres increasingly less accessible to the layman. The discussions of Husserl by Wit-

kiewicz's heroes can scarcely interest a reader of even better-than-average education; whereas the peasants remained bound to the Church, be it only emotionally and traditionally. Music, painting, and poetry became something completely foreign to the great majority of people. A theory developed that art should become a substitute for religion: "metaphysical feelings" were to be expressed in the "compression of pure form"; and so form soon came to dominate content.

To belong to the masses is the great longing of the "alienated" intellectual. It is such a powerful longing that, in trying to appease it, a great many of them who once looked to Germany or Italy for inspiration have now become converted to the New Faith. Actually, the rightist totalitarian program was exceptionally poor. The only gratification it offered came from collective *warmth:* crowds, red faces, mouths open in a shout, marches, arms brandishing sticks; but little rational satisfaction. Neither racist doctrines, nor hatred of foreigners, nor the glorification of one's own national traditions could efface the feeling that the entire program was improvised to deal with problems of the moment. But Murti-Bing is different. It lays scientific foundations. At the same time, it scraps all vestiges of the past. Post-Kantian philosophy, fallen into disrepute because of its remoteness from the life of men; art designed for those who, having no religion, dare not admit that to seek the "absolute" through a juxtaposition of colors and sounds is cowardly and inconclusive thinking; and the semimagic, semireligious mentality of the peasants—these are replaced by a *single* system, a single language of ideas. The truck driver and elevator operator employed by a publishing firm now read the same Marxist classics as its director or staff writers. A day laborer and a historian can reach an understanding on this basis of common reading. Obviously, the difference that may exist between them in mental level is no smaller than that which separated a theologian from a village blacksmith in the Middle Ages.

But the fundamental principles are universal; the great spiritual schism has been obliterated. Dialectical materialism has united everyone, and philosophy (i.e., dialectics) once more determines the patterns of life. It is beginning to be regarded with a respect one reserves only for a force on which important things depend: bread and milk for one's children, one's own happiness and safety. The intellectual has once more become *useful.* He who may once have done his thinking and writing in his free moments away from a paying job in a bank or post office, has now

found his rightful place on earth. He has been restored to society, whereas the businessmen, aristocrats, and tradespeople who once considered him a harmless blunderer have now been dispossessed. They are indeed delighted to find work as cloakroom attendants and to hold the coat of a former employee of whom they said, in prewar days, "It seems he writes." We must not oversimplify, however, the gratifications of personal ambition; they are merely the outward and visible signs of social usefulness, symbols of a recognition that strengthens the intellectual's feeling of *belonging*.

The Absurd

Even though one seldom speaks about metaphysical motives that can lead to a complete change of people's political opinions, such motives do exist and can be observed in some of the most sensitive and intelligent men. Let us imagine a spring day in a city situated in some country similar to that described in Witkiewicz's novel. One of his heroes is taking a walk. He is tormented by what we may call the suction of the absurd. What is the significance of the lives of the people he passes, of the senseless bustle, the laughter, the pursuit of money, the stupid animal diversions? By using a little intelligence he can easily classify the passersby according to type; he can guess their social status, their habits and their preoccupations. A fleeting moment reveals their childhood, manhood, and old age, and then they vanish. A purely physiological study of one particular passer-by in preference to another is meaningless. If one penetrates into the minds of these people, one discovers utter nonsense. They are totally unaware of the fact that nothing is their own, that everything is part of their historical formation—their occupations, their clothes, their gestures and expressions, their beliefs and ideas. They are the force of inertia personified, victims of the delusion that each individual exists as a self. If at least these were souls, as the Church taught, or the monads of Leibnitz! But these beliefs have perished. What remains is an aversion to an atomized vision of life, to the mentality that *isolates* every phenomenon, such as eating, drinking, dressing, earning money, fornicating. And what is there beyond these things? Should such a state of affairs continue? Why should it continue? Such questions are almost synonymous with what is known as hatred of the bourgeoisie.

Let a new man arise, one who, instead of submitting to the world, will transform it. Let him create a historical formation, instead of yielding to its bondage. Only thus can he redeem the absurdity of his physiological existence. Man must be made to understand this, by force and by suffering. Why shouldn't he suffer? He ought to suffer. Why can't he be used as manure, as long as he remains evil and stupid? If the intellectual must know the agony of thought, why should he spare others this pain? Why should he shield those who until now drank, guffawed, gorged themselves, cracked inane jokes, and found life beautiful?

The intellectual's eyes twinkle with delight at the persecution of the bourgeoisie, and of the bourgeois mentality. It is a rich reward for the degradation he felt when he had to be part of the middle class, and when there seemed to be no way out of the cycle of birth and death. Now he has moments of sheer intoxication when he sees the intelligentsia, unaccustomed to rigorously tough thinking, caught in the snare of the revolution. The peasants, burying hoarded gold and listening to foreign broadcasts in the hope that a war will save them from collectivization, certainly have no ally in him. Yet he is warm-hearted and good; he is a friend of mankind. Not mankind as it is, but as it *should* be. He is not unlike the inquisitor of the Middle Ages; but whereas the latter tortured the flesh in the belief that he was saving the individual soul, the intellectual of the New Faith is working for the salvation of the human species in general.

Necessity

His chief characteristic is his fear of thinking for himself. It is not merely that he is afraid to arrive at dangerous conclusions. His is a fear of sterility, of what Marx called the misery of philosophy. Let us admit that a man is no more than an instrument in an orchestra directed by the muse of History. It is only in this context that the notes he produces have any significance. Otherwise even his most brilliant solos become simply a highbrow's diversions.

We are not concerned with the question of how one finds the courage to oppose the majority. Instead we are concerned with a much more poignant question: can one write well outside that one real stream whose vitality springs from its harmony with historical laws and the dynamics of

reality? Rilke's* poems may be very good, but if they are, that means there must have been some reason for them in his day. Contemplative poems, such as his, could never appear in a people's democracy, not only because it would be difficult to publish them, but because the writer's impulse to write them would be destroyed at its very root. The objective conditions for such poetry have disappeared, and the intellectual of whom I speak is not one who believes in writing for the bureau drawer. He curses and despairs over the censorship and demands of the publishing trusts. Yet at the same time, he is profoundly suspicious of unlicensed literature. The publishing license he himself receives does not mean that the editor appreciates the artistic merits of his book, nor that he expects it to be popular with the public. That license is simply a sign that its author reflects the transformation of reality with scientific exactness. Dialectical materialism in the Stalinist version both reflects and directs this transformation. It creates social and political conditions in which a man ceases to think and write otherwise than as necessary. He accepts this "must" because nothing worthwhile can exist outside its limits. Herein lie the claws of dialectics. The writer does not surrender to this "must" merely because he fears for his own skin. He fears for something much more precious—the significance of his work. He believes that the by-ways of "philosophizing" lead to a greater or lesser degree of graphomania. Anyone gripped in the claws of dialectics is forced to admit that the thinking of private philosophers, unsupported by citations from authorities, is sheer nonsense. If this is so, then one's total effort must be directed toward following the line, and there is no point at which one can stop.

The pressure of the state machine is nothing compared with the pressure of a convincing argument. I attended the artists' congresses in Poland in which the theories of socialist realism were first discussed. The attitude of the audience toward the speakers delivering the required reports was decidedly hostile. Everyone considered socialist realism an officially imposed theory that would have, as Russian art demonstrates, deplorable results. Attempts to provoke discussion failed. The listeners remained silent. Usually, however, one daring artist would launch an attack, full of restrained sarcasm, with the silent but obvious support of the entire audi-

* Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) was a Bohemian poet and essayist whose major works include *Duino Elegies* and *Letters to a Young Poet.*

ence. He would invariably be crushed by superior reasoning plus practicable threats against the future career of an undisciplined individual. Given the conditions of convincing argument plus such threats, the necessary conversion will take place. That is mathematically certain.

The faces of the listeners at these congresses were not completely legible, for the art of masking one's feelings had already been perfected to a considerable degree. Still one was aware of successive waves of emotion: anger, fear, amazement, distrust, and finally thoughtfulness. I had the impression that I was participating in a demonstration of mass hypnosis. These people could laugh and joke afterwards in the corridors. But the harpoon had hit its mark, and henceforth wherever they may go, they will always carry it with them. Do I believe that the dialectic of the speakers was unanswerable? Yes, as long as there was no fundamental discussion of methodology. No one among those present was prepared for such a discussion. It would probably have been a debate on Hegel, whose reading public was not made up of painters and writers. Moreover, even if someone had wanted to start it, he would have been silenced, for such discussions are permitted—and even then, fearfully—only in the upper circles of the Party.

These artists' congresses reveal the inequality between the weapons of the dialectician and those of his adversary. A match between the two is like a duel between a foot soldier and a tank. Not that every dialectician is so very intelligent or so very well educated, but all his statements are enriched by the cumulated thought of the masters and their commentators. If every sentence he speaks is compact and effective, that is not due to his own merits, but to those of the classics he has studied. His listeners are defenseless. They could, it is true, resort to arguments derived from their observations of life, but such arguments are just as badly countenanced as any questioning of fundamental methodology. The dialectician rubs up against his public at innumerable meetings of professional organizations and youth groups in clubs, factories, office buildings, and village huts throughout the entire converted area of Europe. And there is no doubt that he emerges the victor in these encounters.

It is no wonder that a writer or painter doubts the wisdom of resistance. If he were sure that art opposed to the official line could have a lasting value, he probably would not hesitate. He would earn his living through some more menial job within his profession, write or paint in

his spare time, and never worry about publishing or exhibiting his work. He believes, however, that in most cases such work would be artistically poor, and he is not far wrong. As we have already said, the objective conditions he once knew have disappeared. The objective conditions necessary to the realization of a work of art are, as we know, a highly complex phenomenon, involving one's public, the possibility of contact with it, the general atmosphere, and above all freedom from involuntary subjective control. "I can't write as I would like to," a young Polish poet admitted to me. "My own stream of thought has so many tributaries, that I barely succeed in damming off one, when a second, third, or fourth overflows. I get halfway through a phrase, and already I submit it to Marxist criticism. I imagine what X or Y will say about it, and I change the ending."

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is this subjective impotence that convinces the intellectual that the one Method is right. Everything proves it is right. Dialectics: I predict the house will burn; then I pour gasoline over the stove. The house burns; my prediction is fulfilled. Dialectics: I predict that a work of art incompatible with socialist realism will be worthless. Then I place the artist in conditions in which such a work *is* worthless. My prediction is fulfilled.

Let us take poetry as an example. Obviously, there is poetry of political significance. Lyric poetry is permitted to exist on certain conditions. It must be: 1) serene; 2) free of any elements of thought that might trespass against the universally accepted principles (in practice, this comes down to descriptions of nature and of one's feelings for friends and family); 3) understandable. Since a poet who is not allowed to *think* in his verse automatically tends to perfect his form, he is accused of formalism.

It is not only the literature and painting of the people's democracies that prove to the intellectual that *things cannot be different.* He is strengthened in this belief by the news that seeps through from the West. The Western world is the world of Witkiewicz's novel. The number of its aesthetic and philosophical aberrations is myriad. Disciples imitate disciples; the past imitates the past. This world lives as if there had never been a Second World War. Intellectual clans in eastern Europe know this life, but know it as a stage of the past that isn't worth looking back on. Even if the new problems are so oppressive that they can break a great many people, at least they are contemporary. And mental discipline and the obligation to be clear are undoubtedly precious. The work of really

fine Western scholars and artists escapes notice. The only new names that are known are those of "democrats"—a delicate circumlocution for a non-pagan. In short, the recompense for all pain is the certainty that one belongs to the new and conquering world, even though it is not nearly so comfortable and joyous a world as its propaganda would have one think.

Success

Mystery shrouds the political moves determined on high in the distant Center, Moscow. People speak about prominent figures in hushed voices. In the vast expanses of Euro-Asia, whole nations can vanish without leaving a trace. Armies number into the millions. Terror becomes socially useful and effective. Philosophers rule the state—obviously not philosophers in the traditional sense of the word, but dialecticians. The conviction grows that the whole world will be conquered. Great hordes of followers appear on all the continents. Lies are concocted from seeds of truth. The philosophically uneducated bourgeois enemy is despised for his inherited inability to think. (Classes condemned by the laws of history perish because their minds are paralyzed.) The boundaries of the Empire move steadily and systematically westward. Unparalleled sums of money are spent on scientific research. One prepares to rule all the people of the earth. Is all this too little ? Surely this is enough to fascinate the intellectual. As he beholds these things, historical fatalism takes root in him. In a rare moment of sincerity he may confess cynically, "I bet on this horse. He's good. He'll carry me far."

A patient has a hard time, however, when the moment comes for him to swallow Murti-Bing in its *entirety.* He becomes such a nervous wreck that he may actually fall ill. He knows it means a definitive parting with his former self, his former ties and habits. If he is a writer, he cannot hold a pencil in his hand. The whole world seems dark and hopeless. Until now, he paid a minimal tribute: in his articles and novels, he described the evils of capitalist society. But after all, it isn't difficult to criticize capitalism, and it can be done honestly. The charlatans of the stock exchange, feudal barons, self-deluding artists, and the instigators of nationalistic wars are figures who lend themselves readily to his pen. But now he must begin to approve. (In official terminology this is known as a transition

from the stage of critical realism to that of socialist realism. It occurred in the newly-established people's democracies about the year 1950.) The operation he must perform on himself is one that some of his friends have already undergone, more or less painfully. They shake their heads sympathetically, knowing the process and its outcome. "I have passed the crisis," they say serenely. "But how he is suffering. He sits at home all day with his head in his hands."

The hardest thing to conquer is his feeling of ***guilt***. No matter what his convictions, every man in the countries of which I speak is a part of an ancient civilization. His parents were attached to religion, or at least regarded it with respect. In school, much attention was devoted to his religious upbringing. Some emotional traces of this early training necessarily remain. In any case, he believes that injury to one's fellow-man, lies, murder, and the encouragement of hatred are evil, even if they serve to accomplish sublime ends. Obviously, too, he studied the history of his country. He read its former poets and philosophers with pleasure and pride. He was proud of its century-long battle to defend its frontiers and of its struggle for independence in the dark periods of foreign occupation. Consciously or unconsciously, he feels a certain loyalty to his forefathers because of the history of toil and sacrifice on their part. Moreover, from earliest childhood, he has been taught that his country belongs to a civilization that has been derived from Rome rather than Byzantium.

Now, knowing that he must enter a gate through which he can never return, he feels he is doing *something wrong*. He explains to himself that he must destroy this irrational and childish feeling. He can become free only by weeding out the roots of what is irretrievably past. Still the battle continues. A cruel battle—a battle between an angel and a demon. True, but which is the angel and which the demon? One has a bright face he has known since his childhood—this must be the angel. No, for this face bears hideous scars. It is the face of the old order, of stupid college fraternities, of the senile imbecility of politicians, of the decrepitude of western Europe. This is death and decadence. The other face is strong and self-contained, the face of a tomorrow that beckons. Angelic? That is doubtful.

There is a great deal of talk about patriotism, about fine, progressive, national traditions, about veneration of the past. But no one is so naïve as to take such talk seriously. The reconstruction of a few historical

monuments, or a reediting of the works of former writers cannot change certain revealing and important facts. Each people's democracy becomes a province of the Empire, ruled by edicts from the Center. It retains some autonomy, but to an ever-diminishing degree. Perhaps the era of independent states is over, perhaps they are no more than museum pieces. Yet it is saddening to say good-bye to one's dreams of a federation of equal nations, of a United States of Europe in which differing languages and differing cultures would have equal status. It isn't pleasant to surrender to the hegemony of a nation which is still wild and primitive, and to concede the absolute superiority of its customs and institutions, science and technology, literature and art. Must one sacrifice so much in the name of the unity of mankind? The nations of western Europe will pass through this phase of integration later, and perhaps more gently. It is possible that they will be more successful in preserving their native language and culture. By that time, however, all of eastern Europe will be using the one universal tongue, Russian. And the principle of a "culture that is national in form, socialist in content" will be consummated in a culture of monolithic uniformity. Everything will be shaped by the Center, though individual countries will retain a few local ornaments in the way of folklore. The Universal City will be realized when a son of the Kirghiz steppes waters his horses in the Loire, and a Sicilian peasant plants cotton in Turkmen valleys. Small wonder the writer smiles at propaganda that cries for a freeing of colonies from the grasp of imperialistic powers. Oh, how cunning dialectics can be, and how artfully it can accomplish its ends, degree by degree!

All this is bitter. But what about the harbinger of the Springtime of Nations, and Karl Marx, and the visions of the brotherhood of mankind? After all, nothing can be accomplished without the iron rule of a single Master. And what about this Master? A great Polish poet, describing his journey to the East—where he went in 1824 as a political prisoner of the Tsar—compared the soul of the Russian nation to a chrysalis. He wondered anxiously what would emerge when the sun of freedom shone: "Then will a shining butterfly take flight, or a moth, a sombre creature of the night?" So far, nothing prophesies a joyous butterfly.

The writer, in his fury and frustration, turns his thought to Western Communists. What fools they are. He can forgive their oratory if it is necessary as propaganda. But they believe most of what they proclaim about

the sacred Center, and that is unforgivable. Nothing can compare to the contempt he feels for these sentimental fools.

Nevertheless, despite his resistance and despair, the crisis approaches. It can come in the middle of the night, at his breakfast table, or on the street. It comes with a metallic click as of engaged gears. *But there is no other way.* That much is clear. There is no other salvation on the face of the earth. This revelation lasts a second; but from that second on, the patient begins to recover. For the first time in a long while, he eats with relish, his movements take on vigor, his color returns. He sits down and writes a "positive" article, marveling at the ease with which he writes it. In the last analysis, there was no reason for raising such a fuss. Everything is in order. He is past the "crisis."

He does not emerge unscathed, however. The aftereffects manifest themselves in a particular kind of extinguishment that is often perceptible in the twist of his lips. His face expresses the peaceful sadness of one who has tasted the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, of one who knows he lies and who feels compassion for those who have been spared full knowledge. He has already gone through what still awaits so many others.

In 1945, an eminent Soviet journalist came to Poland. He was an elderly gentleman, who looked like a middle-class lawyer. That he was an extremely clever and rather unscrupulous person was evidenced by the tenacity with which he had maintained his position—and by his advanced years. After his return to Warsaw from a tour of several provincial Polish towns, he laughingly recounted an incident that had occurred in Silesia. Someone had spread the report that a delegation of foreigners from the West had arrived. The journalist (whose round belly and honest expression were inducive to such effusive manifestations of confidence) was seized and embraced on the street by a man crying: "The English have come." "That's just how it was in the Ukraine in 1919," was the journalist's comment on the incident. This recurrence of sterile hopes amused him and he was flattered to be the representative of a country ruled according to infallible predictions; for nation after nation had indeed become part of its Empire, according to schedule. I am not sure that there wasn't in his smile something of the compassionate *superiority* that a housewife feels for a mouse caught in her trap.

The "post-crisis" writer may well expect one day to be sent on a similar journalistic mission to some newly acquired Western country. Such a

prospect is not altogether distasteful. To observe people who know nothing, who still have everything to learn, must undoubtedly afford moments of unadulterated sweetness. The master knows that the trap in which the mouse has been caught is not an entirely agreeable place to live in. For the moment, however, the citizens of these newly converted countries will understand little of their new situation. They will be exhilarated at first by the flutter of national banners, the blare of marching bands, and the proclamations of long-awaited reforms. Only he, the observer, will see into the future like a god; and know it to be hard, necessarily hard, for such are the laws of History.

In the epilogue of Witkiewicz's novel, his heroes, who have gone over to the service of Murti-Bing, become schizophrenics. The events of today bear out his vision, even in this respect. One can survive the "crisis" and function perfectly, writing or painting as one must, but the old moral and aesthetic standards continue to exist on some deep inner plane. Out of this arises a split within the individual that makes for many difficulties in his daily life. It facilitates the task of ferreting out heretical thoughts and inclinations; for thanks to it, the Murti-Bingist can feel himself into his opponent with great acuteness. The new phase and the old phase exist simultaneously in him, and together they render him an experienced psychologist, a keeper of his brother's conscience.

One can expect that the new generation, raised from the start in the new society, will be free of this split. But that cannot be brought about quickly. One would have to eradicate the Church completely, which is a difficult matter and one that demands patience and tact. And even if one could eliminate this reverenced mainstay of irrational impulses, national literatures would remain to exert their malignant influence. For example, the works of the greatest Polish poets are marked by a dislike of Russia, and the dose of Catholic philosophy one finds in them is alarming. Yet the state must publish certain of these poets and must teach them in its schools for they are the classics, the creators of the literary language, and are considered the forerunners of the Revolution. To place them on the index would be to think nondialectically and to fall into the sin of "leftism." It is a difficult dilemma, more difficult in the converted countries than in the Center, where the identification of national culture with the interests of humanity has been achieved to a great degree. Probably, therefore, the schizophrenic as a type will not disappear in the near future.

Someone might contend that Murti-Bing is a medicine that is incompatible with human nature. That is not a very strong argument The Aztecs' custom of offering human sacrifices to their gods, or the mortification of the flesh practiced by the early Christian hermits scarcely seem praiseworthy. The worship of gold has become a motive power second to none in its brutality. Seen from this perspective, Murti-Bing does not violate the nature of humankind.

Whether a man who has taken the Murti-Bing cure attains internal peace and harmony is another question. He attains a relative degree of harmony, just enough to render him active. It is preferable to the torment of pointless rebellion and groundless hope. The peasants, who are incorrigible in their petty bourgeois attachments, assert that "a change must come, because *this can't go on*." This is an amusing belief in the natural order of things. A tourist, as an anecdote tells us, wanted to go up into the mountains, but it had been raining for a week. He met a mountaineer walking by a stream, and asked him if it would continue to pour. The mountaineer looked at the rising waters and voiced the opinion that it would not. When asked on what basis he had made his prediction, he said, "Because the stream would overflow." Murti-Bing holds such magic judgments to be phantoms of a dying era. The "new" is striving to overcome the "old," but the "old" cannot be eliminated all at once.

The one thing that seems to deny the perfection of Murti-Bing is the apathy that is born in people, and that lives on in spite of their feverish activity. It is hard to define, and at times one might suppose it to be a mere optical illusion. After all, people bestir themselves, work, go to the theater, applaud speakers, take excursions, fall in love, and have children. Yet there is something impalpable and unpleasant in the human climate of such cities as Warsaw or Prague. The collective atmosphere, resulting from an exchange and a recombination of individual fluids, is bad. It is an aura of strength and unhappiness, of internal paralysis and external mobility. Whatever we may call it, this much is certain: if hell should guarantee its lodgers magnificent quarters, beautiful clothes, the tastiest food, and all possible amusements, but condemn them to breathe in this aura forever, that would be punishment enough.

No propaganda, either pro or con, can capture so elusive and little-known a phenomenon. It escapes all calculations. It cannot exist on paper. Admitting, in whispered conversation, that something of the sort does

exist, one must seek a rational explanation for it. Undoubtedly the "old," fearful and oppressed, is taking its vengeance by spilling forth its inky fluid like a wounded octopus. But surely the socialist organism, in its growth toward a future of guaranteed prosperity, is already strong enough to counteract this poison; or perhaps it is too early for that. When the younger generation, free from the malevolent influence of the "old," arises, everything will change. Only, whoever has observed the younger generation in the Center is reluctant to cast such a horoscope. Then we must postpone our hopes to the remote future, to a time when the Center and every dependent state will supply its citizens with refrigerators and automobiles, with white bread and a handsome ration of butter. Maybe then, at last, they will be satisfied.

Why won't the equation work out as it should, when every step is logical? Do we have to use non-Euclidian geometry on material as classic, as adaptable, and as plastic as a human being? Won't the ordinary variety satisfy him? What the devil does a man need?

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The Smatterers*
(1975)

ALEKSANDR I. SOLZHENITSYN

The fateful peculiarities of the educated stratum of Russians before the revolution were thoroughly analyzed in *Vekhi (Landmarks)*—and indignantly repudiated by the entire intelligentsia and by all political parties from the Constitutional Democrats to the Bolsheviks. The prophetic depth of *Vekhi* failed (as its authors knew it would fail) to arouse the sympathies of the Russian reading public; it had no influence on the development of the situation in Russia and was unable to avert the disastrous events which followed. Before long the very title of the book, exploited by another group of writers with narrowly political interests and low standards *(Smena Vekh—New Bearings),* was to grow blurred and dim and to disappear entirely from the memory of new generations of educated Russians, as the book itself inevitably disappeared from official Soviet libraries. But even after sixty years its testimony has not lost its brightness:

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* This essay was first published in Paris in 1974 in a volume called *From Under the Rubble* shortly after Solzhenitsyn was arrested and preparing for his exile. Edited by Solzhenitsyn, the volume contains eleven essays by seven authors (three essays by Solzhenitsyn himself). It is modeled on the 1909 collection *Vekhi* (or *Landmarks*) in which prominent formerly radical intellectuals repudiated the reigning atheistic, revolutionary, intellectual atmosphere. The version of the essay published here is significantly abridged. The title refers to a section of Russian society. The "smatterers" retain the outward polish of the old intelligentsia and do not hesitate to refer to themselves as such, bur Solzhenitsyn calls them "the semieducared estate."

Vekhi today still seems to us to have been a vision of the future. And our only cause for rejoicing is that now, after sixty years, the stratum of Russian society able to lend its support to the book appears to be deepening.

We read *Vekhi* today with a dual awareness, for the ulcers we are shown seem to belong not just to an era that is past history, but in many respects to our own times as well. That is why it is almost impossible to begin talking about today's intelligentsia (a problematical term which for the moment, in this first part, we shall take as referring to "that mass of people who call themselves by this name," and an intellectual—an "*intelligent*"—"any person who demands that he be regarded as such"), without drawing a comparison between its present attributes and the conclusions of *Vekhi*. Historical hindsight always offers a better understanding.

However, being in no way obliged to preserve the comprehensive structure of *Vekhi's* analysis, we shall for the limited purposes of the present survey take the liberty of summarizing and regrouping *Vekhi's* conclusions into the following four categories:

(1) *Faults of the old intelligentsia* which were important in the context of Russian history but which today have either faded away, or still exist in a much weaker form, or have become diametrically reversed:

Clannish, unnatural disengagement from the general life of the nation. (Today there is a considerable feeling of involvement by virtue of the intelligentsia's employed status.) Intense opposition to the state as a matter of principle. (Today it is only in its private thoughts and among small circles of friends that the intelligentsia draws a distinction between its own interests and those of the state, delights in any failure on the part of the state, and passively sympathizes with any show of resistance; in all else it is the loyal servant of the state.) Individual moral cowardice in the face of "public opinion," mental mediocrity at the individual level. (Now far outstripped by total cowardice when confronted by the will of the state.) Love of egalitarian justice, the social good and the material well-being of the people, which paralyzed its love of and interest in the truth; the "temptation of the Grand Inquisitor": let the truth perish if people will be the happier for it. (Nowadays it has no such broad concerns. Nowadays it is "let the truth perish if by paying that price I can preserve myself and my family.") Infatuation with the intelligentsia's general credo; ideological intolerance of any other; hatred as a passionate ethical impulse. (All this bursting passion has now disappeared.) Fanaticism that

made the intelligentsia deaf to the voice of life. (Nowadays: accommodation and adaptation to practical considerations.) There was no word more unpopular with the intelligentsia than "humility." (Now they have humbled themselves to the point of servility.) Daydreaming, a naïve idealism, an inadequate sense of reality. (Today they have a sober, utilitarian understanding of it.) A nihilistic attitude to labor. (Extinct.) Unfitness for practical work. (Fitness.) A strenuous, unanimous atheism which uncritically accepted the competence of science to decide even matters of religion—once and for all and of course negatively; dogmatic idolatry of man and mankind; the replacement of religion by a faith in scientific progress. (The atheism has abated in intensity, but is still as widespread among the mass of the educated stratum; by now it has grown traditional and insipid, though unconditional obeisance is still made to scientific progress and the notion that "man is the measure of all things.") Mental inertia; the feebleness of autonomous intellectual activity and even hostility to autonomous spiritual claims. (Today, on the contrary, there are some educated people who make up for their withdrawal from public passion, faith, and action by indulging at their leisure, in their closed shell and among their circle of friends, in quite intensive intellectual activity, although usually with no relevance to the outside world—sometimes by way of anonymous, secret appearances in *samizdat.**)

In the main *Vekhi* was critical of the intelligentsia and set down those of its vices and inadequacies that were a danger to progress in Russia. It contains no separate analysis of the virtues of the intelligentsia. Yet looking at *Vekhi* comparatively from an angle of vision that enables us to take account of the qualities of the educated stratum of the present time, we find that, among its faults, the authors of *Vekhi* also list features which today cannot be viewed otherwise than as

(2) *Virtues of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia:* A universal search for an integral worldview, a thirst for faith (albeit secular), and an urge to subordinate one's life to this faith. (Nothing comparable exists today, only tired cynicism.) Social compunction, a sense of guilt with regard to the people. (Nowadays the opposite is widely felt: that the people is guilty toward the intelligentsia and will not repent.) Moral judgments and moral considerations occupy an exceptional position in the soul of the Russian

* *Samizdat* refers to self or underground publishing.

intellectual: all thought of himself is egoism; his personal interests and very existence must be unconditionally subordinated to service to society; puritanism, personal asceticism, total selflessness, even abhorrence and fear of personal wealth as a burden and a temptation. (None of this relates to us—we are quite the reverse!) A fanatical willingness to sacrifice oneself—even an active quest for such sacrifice; although this path is trodden by only a handful of individuals, it is nevertheless the obligatory and only worthy ideal aspired to by all. (This is unrecognizable, this is not us! All that remains in common is the word "intelligentsia," which has survived through force of habit.)

The Russian intelligentsia cannot have been so base if *Vekhi* could apply such lofty criteria in its criticism of it. This will strike us even more forcibly when we look at the group of characteristics depicted by *Vekhi* as

(3) *Faults at the time,* which in our topsy-turvy world of today have the *appearance almost of virtues*:

The aim of universal equality, in whose interests the individual must be prepared to curtail his higher needs. The psychology of heroic ecstasy, reinforced by state persecution; parties are popular in proportion to their degree of fearlessness. (Today the persecution is crueler and more systematic, and induces depression instead of ecstasy.) A personal sense of martyrdom and a compulsion to confess; almost a death wish. (The desire now is for self-preservation.) The heroic intellectual is not content with the modest role of worker and dreams of being the savior of mankind or at least of the Russian people. Exaltation, an irrational mood of elation, intoxication with struggle. He is convinced that the only course open to him is social struggle and the destruction of society in its existing form. (Nothing of the kind! The only possible course is subservience, sufferance, and the hope of mercy.)

But we have not lost all of our spiritual heritage. We too are recognizably there.

(4) *Faults inherited in the present day:*

Lack of sympathetic interest in the history of our homeland, no feeling of blood relationship with its history. Insufficient sense of historical reality. This is why the intelligentsia lives *in expectation of a social miracle* (in those days they did a great deal to bring it about; now they make it less and less possible for the miracle to happen—but hope for it all the same!). All that is bad is the result of outward disorganization and con-

sequently all that is needed are external reforms. Autocracy is responsible for everything that is happening, therefore the intellectual is relieved of all personal responsibility and personal guilt. An exaggerated awareness of their rights. Pretentiousness, posturing, the hypocrisy of constant recourse to "principles"—to rigid abstract arguments. An overweening insistence on the opposition between themselves and the "philistines." Spiritual arrogance. The religion of self-deification—the intelligentsia sees its existence as providential for the country.

This all tallies so perfectly that it needs no comment.

Let us add a dash of Dostoyevsky (from *The Diary of a Writer*):

Faintheartedness. A tendency to jump to pessimistic conclusions.

And many more qualities of the old intelligentsia would have survived in the present one if the *intelligentsia itself* had remained in existence.

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It is all very well to charge the working class at the present time with being excessively law-abiding, uninterested in the spiritual life, immersed in philistinism and totally preoccupied with material concerns—getting an apartment, buying tasteless furniture (the only kind in the shops), playing cards and dominoes or watching television and getting drunk—but have the smatterers, even in the capital, risen all that much higher? Dearer furniture, higher-quality concerts, and cognac instead of vodka? But it watches the same hockey matches on television. On the fringes of smatterdom an obsession with wage-levels may be essential to survival, but at its resplendent center (in sixteen republican capitals and a handful of closed towns) it is disgusting to see all ideas and convictions subordinated to the mercenary pursuit of bigger and better salaries, titles, positions, apartments, villas, cars (Pomerants:* "A dinner service is compensation for lost nerves"), and—even more—trips abroad! (Wouldn't this have amazed the prerevolutionary intelligentsia! It needs explaining: new impressions, a gay time, the good life, an expense account in foreign currency, the chance to buy gaudy rags. . . . For this reason I think even the sorriest member of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia would refuse to shake hands with the most

* Pomerants. Solzhenitsyn comments extensively on his work (essays published in *samizdat*) in other sections of the essay not reproduced here.

illustrious of our metropolitan smatterers today.) But what distinguishes the mentality of the Moscow smatterers more than anything else is their greed for awards, prizes and titles far beyond the reach of the working class or the provincial smatterers—the prize money is higher, and what resounding titles they are: "People's Artist (Actor, etc.) . . . Meritorious Practitioner . . . Laureate . . ."! For all this people are not ashamed to toe the line punctiliously, break off all unapproved friendships, carry out all the wishes of their superiors and condemn any one of their colleagues either in writing or from a public platform, or simply by refusing to shake his hand, if the party committee orders them to.

If all these are the qualities of the *intelligentsia,* who are the *philistines?*

People whose names we used to read not so long ago on our cinema screens and who passed for members of the intelligentsia if anyone did, who recently left this country for good, saw no shame in taking eighteenth-century escritoires to pieces (the export of antiques is prohibited), nailing the pieces to some ordinary planks of wood to make grotesque "furniture," and exporting them in that form. Can one still bring oneself to utter the word "intelligentsia"? It is only a customs regulation that prevents icons older than the seventeenth century from leaving the country. Whole exhibitions of later icons are at this very moment being staged in Europe—and not only the state has been selling abroad. . . .

Everybody who lives in our country pays dues for the maintenance of the obligatory ideological lie. But for the working class, and all the more so for the peasantry, the dues are minimal, especially now that the financial loans which used to be extorted annually have been abolished (it was the fake voluntariness of these loans that was so perfidious and so distressing: the money could have been appropriated by some other means); all they now have to do is vote every so often at some general meeting where absenteeism is not checked with particular thoroughness. Our state bailiffs and ideological inculcators, on the other hand, sincerely believe in their ideology, many of them having devoted themselves to it out of long years of inertia or ignorance, or because of man's psychological quirk of liking to have a philosophy of life that matches his basic work.

But what of our central smatterers? Perfectly well aware of the shabbiness and flabbiness of the party lie and ridiculing it among themselves, they yet cynically repeat the lie with their very next breath, issuing "wrathful" protests and newspaper articles in ringing, rhetorical tones, and expand-

ing and reinforcing it by their eloquence and style! Where did Orwell light upon his *doublethink,* what was his model if not the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1930s and 1940s? And since that time this doublethink has been worked up to perfection and become a permanent part of our lives.

Oh, we crave *freedom,* we denounce (in a whisper) anyone who ventures to doubt the desirability and necessity of total freedom in our country. (Meaning, in all probability, not freedom for everyone but certainly for the central smatterers. Pomerants, in a letter to the twenty-third Party Congress, proposes setting up an association of the "nucleus of the intelligentsia," which would have a free press at its disposal and be a theoretical center giving advice to the administrative and party centers.). But we are waiting for this freedom to fall into our lap like some unexpected miracle, without any effort on our part, while we ourselves do nothing to win this freedom. Never mind the old traditions of supporting people in political trouble, feeding the fugitive, sheltering the pass-less or the homeless (we might lose our state-controlled jobs)—the central smatterers labor day after day, conscientiously and sometimes even with talent, to strengthen our common prison. And even for this they will not allow themselves to be blamed! A multitude of excuses has been primed, pondered and prepared. Tripping up a colleague or publishing lies in a newspaper statement is resourcefully justified by the perpetrator and unanimously accepted by his associates: If I (he) hadn't done it, they would have sacked me (him) from my (his) job and appointed somebody worse! So in order to maintain the principle of what is *good* and for the benefit of all, it is natural that every day you will find yourself obliged to harm the few ("honorable men play dirty tricks on their neighbors only when they have to"). But the few are *themselves* guilty: why did they flaunt themselves so indiscreetly in front of the bosses, without a thought for the *collective*? Or why did they hide their questionnaires from the personnel department and thus *lay the entire collective open to attack*? Chelnov (in the *Vestnik RSKD,** No. 97) wittily describes the intelligentsia's position as *standing crookedly*—"*from* which position the vertical seems a ridiculous posture."

But the chief justifying argument is: *children!* In the face of this argu-

* *Vestnik RSKD* (Russkogo Khristianskogo Studencheskogo Dvizhenia—Herald of the Russian Student Christian Movement) was a Russian journal published in Paris by the YMCA Press—an outlet for the publication and circulation of Russian *samizdat* essays.

ment everyone falls silent: for who has the right to sacrifice the material welfare of his children for the sake of an *abstract* principle of truth?! That the moral health of their children is more precious than their careers does not even enter the parents' heads, so impoverished have they themselves become. And it is reasonable that their children should grow up the same: pragmatists right from their school days, first-year students already resigned to the lie of the political education class, already shrewdly weighing their most profitable way into the competitive world of science. Theirs is a generation that has experienced no real persecution, but how cautious it is! And those few youths—the hope of Russia—who turn and look truth in the face are usually cursed and even persecuted by their infuriated, affluent parents.

And you cannot excuse the central smatterers, as you could the peasants in former times, by saying that they were scattered about the provinces, knew nothing of events in general, and were suppressed on the local level. Throughout the years of Soviet power the intelligentsia has been well enough informed, has known what was going on in the world, and *could* have known what was going on in its own country, but it looked away and feebly surrendered in every organization and every office, indifferent to the *common* cause. For decade after decade, of course, it has been held in an unprecedented stranglehold (people in the West will never be able to imagine it until their turn comes). People of dynamic initiative, responsive to all forms of public and private assistance, have been stifled by oppression and fear, and public assistance itself has been soiled by a hypocritical state-run imitation. Finally, they have been placed in a situation where there appears to be no third choice: if a colleague is being hounded no one dares to remain neutral—at the slightest evasion he himself will be hounded too. But there is still a way out for people, even in this situation, and that is to let themselves be hounded! Let my children grow up on a crust of bread, so long as they are honest! If the intelligentsia were like *this,* it would be invincible.

There is also a special category of distinguished people whose names have become so firmly and inviolably established and who are so protectively cloaked in national and sometimes international fame that, in the post-Stalin period at least, they are well beyond the reach of the police, which is plain as plain could be from both near and far; nor do they fear need—they've put plenty aside. Could not *they* resurrect the honor and

independence of the Russian intelligentsia? Could not *they* speak out in defense of the persecuted, in defense of freedom, against rank injustices and the squalid lies that are foisted upon us? Two hundred such men (and they number half a thousand altogether) by coming forward and taking a united stand would purify the public air in our country and all but transform our whole life! The prerevolutionary intelligentsia did this in their thousands, without waiting for the protection of fame. But can we find as many as ten among our smatterers? The rest feel no such *need*! (Even a person whose father was shot thinks nothing of it, swallows the fact.) And what shall we say about our prominent men at the top? Are they any better than the smatterers?

In Stalin's day, if you refused to sign some newspaper smear or denunciation, or to call for the death or imprisonment of your comrade, you really might have been threatened with death or imprisonment yourself. But today—what threat today induces our silver-haired and eminent elders to take up their pens, obsequiously asking "where?", and sign some vile nonsense concocted by a third person about Sakharov?* Only their own worthlessness. What force impels a great twentieth-century composer to become the pitiful puppet of third-rate bureaucrats from the Ministry of Culture and at their bidding sign any contemptible piece of paper that is pushed at him, defending whoever they tell him to abroad and hounding whoever they want him to at home? (The composer's soul has come into direct and intimate contact—with no screen in between—with the dark, destructive soul of the twentieth century. He has gripped—no, it has gripped him with such piercing authenticity that when—if!—mankind enters upon a more enlightened age, our descendants will hear from Shostakovich's† music how we were in the devil's clutches, utterly in its possession, and that we found beauty in those clutches and in that infernal breathing.)

Was the behavior of the great Russian scholars in the past ever so wretched? Or the great Russian artists? Their tradition has been broken: we are the smatterers.

What is triply shameful is that now it is not fear of persecution, but devious calculations of vanity, self-interest, personal welfare, and tranquil-

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* Andrei Sakharov (1921–1989) was an eminent Russian physicist and dissident who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

† Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) was a celebrated Russian composer.

ity that make the "Moscow stars" among the smatterers and the middle stratum of "moderates" so pliant. Lydia Chukovskaya[1] is right: the time has come to count *some* people out of the intelligentsia. And if that doesn't mean all *these,* then the meaning of the word has been irretrievably lost.

Oh, there have been fearless people! Fearless enough to speak up for an old building that was being demolished (as long as it wasn't a cathedral), and even the whole Lake Baikal area.[2] And we must be thankful for that, of course. One of the contributors to the present anthology was to have been an exceptionally distinguished person with a string of ranks and titles to his name. In private conversations his heart bleeds for the irrevocable ruin that has befallen the Russian people. He knows our history and our culture through and through. But—he declined: *What's the use? Nothing will come of it* . . . the usual good excuse of the smatterers.

We have got what we deserve. So low have we sunk.

When they jerked the string from on top and said we could be a little bolder (1956, 1962) we straightened our numbed spines just a trifle. When they jerked "quiet!" (1957, 1963) we subsided at once.* There was also the spontaneous occurrence of 1967–1968, when *samizdat* came pouring out like a spring flood, more and more names appeared, new names signed protests and it seemed that only a little more was needed, only a tiny bit more, and we should begin to breathe. And did it take all that much to crush us? Fifty or so of the most audacious people were deprived of work in their professions. A few were expelled from the party, a few from the unions, and eighty or so protest signers were *summoned for discussions* with their party committee. And they came away from those "discussions" pale and crestfallen.

And the smatterers took flight, dropping in their haste their most important discovery, the very condition of continued existence, rebirth and thought—*samizdat.* Was it so long ago since the smatterers had been in hot pursuit of the latest items of *samizdat,* begging for extra copies to

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* The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of 1956 was the site of Krushchev's famous denunciation of Stalin. This coincided with a continuing "thaw" in Soviet control of cultural life that had begun with Stalin's death. Nineteen sixty-two brought the publication, with Krushchev's approval, of Solzhenitsyn's own *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* The years 1957 and 1963 included attempts by the regime to reassert stricter control after moments of liberalization.

be typed, starting to collect *samizdat* libraries or sending *samizdat* to the provinces? Now they began to burn those libraries and cherish the virginity of their typewriters, only occasionally borrowing a forbidden leaflet in some dark passageway, snatching a quick look at it and returning it at once as if they had burned their fingers.

Yes, in the course of those persecutions a definite *core of the intelligentsia* did take shape and emerge into view, consisting of people who continued to risk their necks and make sacrifices—by openly or in wordless secrecy keeping dangerous materials, by fearlessly helping prisoners or by paying with their own freedom.

But there was another "core" that also came to light and discovered an ingenious alternative: to flee the country! Thereby preserving their own unique individuality *("over there* I shall be able to develop Russian culture in peace and quiet"). Or saving those whom they had left behind ("from *over there* we shall be better able to defend your rights here"). Or, finally, saving their children, who were more precious than the children of the rest of their compatriots.

Such was the "core of the Russian intelligentsia" that came to light and that could exist even without Russia. But all this would be forgiven us, would arouse only sympathy—our downtrodden degradation and our subservience to the lie—if we meekly confessed to our infirmity, our attachment to material prosperity, our spiritual unpreparedness for trials too severe for us to bear: we are the victims of history that happened before our time, we were born into it, and have tasted our fair share of it, and here we are, floundering and not knowing how to escape from it.

But no! We contrive in this situation to find tortuous excuses of stunning sublimity as to why we should "become spiritually aware of ourselves without abandoning our scientific research institutes" (Pomerants)—as if "becoming spiritually aware" were a matter of cozy reflection, not of harsh ordeal and merciless trial. We have not renounced our arrogance in the least. We insist on the noble, inherited title of intelligentsia, on the right to be the supreme arbiters of every spiritual manifestation in our own country and of mankind: to make peremptory judgments about social theories, trends, movements, historical currents and the activities of prominent individuals from the safety of our burrows. Even as we put on our coats in the lobbies of our institutes we grow a head taller, and by the evening over the tea table we are already pronouncing the supreme judg-

ment and deciding which actions and which of their perpetrators the "intelligentsia will forgive" or "not forgive."

Observing the pitiful way the central smatterers actually behave in the service of the Soviet state, it is impossible to believe the high historical pedestal they see themselves as occupying—each placing himself, his friends, and his colleagues on that pedestal. The increasingly narrow specialization of professional disciplines, which enables semi-ignoramuses to become doctors of science, does not bother the smatterer in the slightest.

But the picture Pomerants paints of the people is, alas, to a large extent true. Just as we are probably mortally offending him now by alleging that there is no longer an intelligentsia in our country, and that it has all disintegrated into a collection of smatterers, so he too mortally wounds us by his assertion that neither is there a *people* any longer.

"The people no longer exists. There is the mass, with a dim recollection that it was once the people and the bearer of God within itself, but now it is utterly empty. . . . The people in the sense of a Chosen People, a source of spiritual values, is nonexistent. There are the neurasthenic intellectuals—and the masses. . . . What do the collective farm workers sing? Some remnants of their peasant heritage" and whatever is drilled into them "at school, in the army and on the radio. . . . Where is it, this 'people'? The real native people, dancing its folk dances, narrating its folk tales, weaving its folk-patterned lace? In our country all that remains are the vestiges of a people, like the vestiges of snow in spring. . . . The people as a great historical force, a backbone of culture, a source of inspiration for Pushkin and Goethe, no longer exists. . . . What is usually called the people in our country is not the people at all but a petit bourgeoisie."

Gloom and doom. And not far from the truth either.

Indeed, how *could* the people have survived? It has been subjected to two processes both tending toward the same end and each lending impetus to the other. One is the universal process (which, if it had been postponed any longer in Russia, we might have escaped altogether) of what is fashionably known as *massovization* (an abominable word, but then the process is no better), a product of the new Western technology, the sickening growth of cities, and the general standardization of meth-

ods of information and education. The second is our own special Soviet process, designed to rub off the age-old face of Russia and rub on another, synthetic one, and this has had a still more decisive and irreversible effect.

How could the people possibly have survived? Icons, obedience to elders, bread-baking, and spinning wheels were all forcibly thrown out of the peasants' cottages. Then millions of cottages—as well-designed and comfortable as one could wish—were completely ravaged, pulled down or put into the wrong hands and five million hardworking, healthy families, together with infants still at the breast, were dispatched to their death on long winter journeys or on their arrival in the tundra. (And our *intelligentsia* did not waver or cry out, and its *progressive* part even assisted in driving them out. *That* was when the intelligentsia ceased to be, in 1930; and is that the moment for which the people must beg its forgiveness?) The destruction of the remaining cottages and homesteads was less trouble after that. They took away the land which had made the peasant a peasant, depersonalized it even more than serfdom had, deprived the peasant of all incentive to work and live, packed some off to the Magnitogorsks,[3] while the rest—a whole generation of doomed women—were forced to feed the colossus of the state before the war, for the entire duration of the war and after the war. All the outward, international successes of our country and the flourishing growth of the thousands of scientific research institutes that now exist have been achieved by devastating the Russian village and the traditional Russian way of life. In its place they have festooned the cottages and the ugly multistory boxes in the suburbs of our cities with loudspeakers, and even worse, have fixed them on all the telegraph poles in city centers (even today they will be blaring over the entire face of Russia from six in the morning until midnight, the supreme mark of culture, and if you go and shut them off it's an anti-Soviet act). And those loudspeakers have done their job well: they have driven everything individual and every bit of folklore out of people's heads and drilled in stock substitutes, they have trampled and defiled the Russian language and dinned vacuous, untalented songs (composed by the intelligentsia) into our ears. They have knocked down the last village churches, flattened and desecrated graveyards, flogged the horse to death with Komsomol zeal, and their tractors and five-ton lorries have polluted and churned up the centuries-old roads whose gentle tracery adorns our countryside. Where is there left, and who is there left to dance and weave lace? Fur-

thermore, they have visited the village youth with specially juicy tidbits in the form of quantities of drab, idiotic films (the intellectual: "We have to release them—they are *mass-circulation* films")—and the same rubbish is crammed into school textbooks and slightly more adult books (and you know *who* writes them, don't you?), to prevent new growth from springing up where the old timber was felled. Like tanks they have ridden roughshod over the entire historical memory of the people (they gave us back Alexander Nevsky without his cross,[4] but anything more recent—no), so how *could* the people possibly have saved itself?

And so, sitting here in the ashes left behind by the conflagration, let us try to work it out.

The people does not exist? Then it's true that there can be no national revival? But what's that gap there? I thought I glimpsed something as a result of the collapse of universal technological progress, in line with the transition that will be made to a stable economy, there will be a restoration everywhere of the primeval attachment of the majority of the people to the land, to the simplest materials and tools, and to physical labor (which many satiated town-dwellers are even now instinctively seeking for themselves). Thus in every country, even the highly developed ones, there will inevitably be a restoration of some sort of successor to the peasant multitudes, something to fill the vacuum left by the people, an agricultural and craftsman class (naturally with a new, but decentralized, technology). But what about us; can the "operatic" peasant return no more?

But then the intelligentsia doesn't exist either, does it? Are the smatterers dead wood for development?

Have *all* the classes been replaced by inferior substitutes? And if so how can we develop?

But surely *someone* exists? And how can one deny human beings a future? Can *human beings* be prevented from going on living? We hear their weary, kindly voices sometimes without even seeing their faces—as they pass by us somewhere in the twilight, we hear them talking of their everyday concerns, which they express in authentic—and sometimes still very spontaneous—Russian speech, we catch sight of their faces, alive and eager, and their smiles, we experience their good deeds for ourselves, sometimes when we least expect them, we observe self-sacrificing families with children undergoing all kinds of hardships rather than destroy a soul—so how can one deny them all a future?

It is rashness to conclude that the people no longer exists. Yes, the village has been routed and its remnants choked, yes, the outlying suburbs are filled with the click of dominoes (one of the achievements of universal literacy) and broken bottles, there are no traditional costumes and no folk dances, the language has been corrupted and thoughts and ambitions even more deformed and misdirected; but why is it that not even these broken bottles, nor the litter blown back and forth by the wind in city courtyards, fills one with such despair as the careerist hypocrisy of the smatterers? It is because *the people* on the whole *takes no part in the official lie,* and this today is its most distinctive feature, allowing one to hope that it is not, as its accusers would have it, utterly devoid of God. Or at any rate, it has preserved a spot in its heart that has still not been scorched or trampled to death.

It is also rashness to conclude that there is no intelligentsia. Each one of us is personally acquainted with at least a handful of people who have resolutely risen above both the lie and the pointless bustle of the smatterers. And I am entirely in accord with those who want to see, who want to believe that they can already see the *nucleus of an intelligentsia,* which is our hope for spiritual renewal. Only I would recognize and distinguish this nucleus by other signs: not by the academic qualifications of its members, nor the number of books they have published, nor by the high educational level of those who "are accustomed to think and fond of thinking, but not of plowing the land," nor by the scientific cleverness of a methodology which so easily creates "professional subcultures," nor by a sense of alienation from state and people, nor by membership in a spiritual diaspora ("nowhere quite at home"). I would recognize this nucleus by the purity of its aspirations, by its spiritual selflessness in the name of truth, and above all for the sake of *this* country, in which it lives. This nucleus will have been brought up not so much in libraries as on spiritual sufferings. It is not the nucleus that wishes to be regarded as a nucleus without having to forego the comforts of life enjoyed by the Moscow smatterers. Dostoyevsky dreamed in 1877 of the appearance in Russia of a generation of "modest and valiant young people." But on *that* occasion it was the "demons" ("the possessed") who appeared—and we can see where that got us. I can testify, however, that during the last few years I have seen these modest and valiant young people with my own eyes, heard them with my own ears; it was they who, like an invisible film, kept me

floating in air over a seeming void and prevented me from falling. Not all of them are still at liberty today, and not all of them will preserve their freedom tomorrow. And far from all of them are evident to our eyes and ears—like spring streams they trickle somewhere beneath the dense, gray, hard-packed snow.

It is the method that is at fault: to reason along the lines of "social strata" and accept no other basis. If you take social strata you will end in despair (as did Amalrik).[5] The intelligentsia as a vast *social stratum* has ended its days in a steaming swamp and can no longer become airborne again. But even in the intelligentsia's former and better times, it was incorrect to include people in the intelligentsia in terms of whole families, clans, groups and strata. There might well have been particular families, clans, groups and strata that were intelligentsia through and through, but even so it is as an individual that a man becomes a member of the intelligentsia in the true sense of the word. If the intelligentsia was a stratum at all, it was a psychological, not a social, one; consequently entrance and exit always depended upon individual conduct, not upon one's occupation or social standing.

A stratum, a people, the masses, the smatterers—they all consist of *human beings,* and there is no way in which the future can be closed to human beings: human beings determine their future themselves, and whatever point has been reached on the crooked, descending path, it is never too late to take a turn for the good and the better.

The future is indestructible, and it is in our hands. If we make the right choices.

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People will laugh at us from outside: what a timid and what a modest step we regard as *sacrifice.* All over the world students are occupying universities, going out into the streets and even toppling governments, while our students are the tamest in the world: tell them it's time for a political education lecture, refuse to let them take their coats out of the cloak room, and nobody will leave. In 1962 the whole of Novocherkassk was in tumult,* but at the Polytechnic Institute they simply locked the door of

* Following price increases in retail goods such as meat and poultry, steelworkers in

the students' quarters and nobody jumped out the windows! Or take the starving Indians, who liberated themselves from British domination by nonviolent, passive resistance and civil disobedience: but we are incapable of even this desperate bravery, neither the working class nor the smatterers, for we have been terrorized for three generations ahead by dear old Uncle Joe: how can you *not carry out* an order of the authorities? That would be the ultimate in self-destruction.

And if we set out in capital letters the nature of the examination we are going to set our fellowmen: DO NOT LIE! DO NOT TAKE PART IN THE LIE! DO NOT SUPPORT THE LIE!—it is not only the Europeans who are going to laugh at us, but also the Arab students and the ricksha-drivers in Ceylon: is this all that is being asked of the Russians? And they call that a *sacrifice,* a bold step, and not simply the mark that distinguishes an honest man from a rogue?

But it is all very well for the apples in another barrel to laugh: those being crushed in ours know that it is indeed a bold step. Because in our country the daily lie is not the whim of corrupt natures bur a mode of existence, a condition of the daily welfare of every man. In our country the lie has been incorporated into the state system as the vital link holding everything together, with billions of tiny fasteners, several dozen to each man.

This is precisely why we find life so oppressive. But it is also precisely why we should find it natural to straighten up. When oppression is not accompanied by the lie, liberation demands political measures. But when the lie has fastened its claws in us, it is no longer a matter of politics! It is an invasion of man's moral world, and our straightening up and *refusing to lie* is also not political, but simply the retrieval of our human dignity.

Which is the *sacrifice?* To go for years without truly breathing, gulping down stench? Or to begin to breathe, as is the prerogative of every man on this earth? What cynic would venture to object aloud to such a policy as *nonparticipation in the lie?*

Oh, people will object at once and with ingenuity: what *is* a lie? Who can determine precisely where the lie ends and truth begins? In every

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a factory in the northern Caucasus city of Novocherkassk went on strike on June 1. Marches and demonstrations followed the next day, the crowd reaching nearly 10,000 as it reached Lenin square in the city. Twenty-three people were killed and eighty-seven more wounded as the Red Army put down the uprising.

historically concrete dialectical situation, and so on—all the evasions that liars have been using for the past half century.

But the answer could not be simpler: decide *yourself,* as *your* conscience dictates. And for a long time this will suffice. Depending upon his horizons, his life experience and his education, each person will have his own perception of the line where the public and state lie begins: one will see it as being altogether remote from him, while another will experience it as a rope already cutting into his neck. And *there,* at the point where *you yourself* in all honesty see the borderline of the lie, is where you must refuse to submit to that lie. You must shun *that part* of the lie that is clear and obvious to you. And if you sincerely cannot see the lie anywhere at all, then go on quietly living as you did before.

What does it mean, *not to lie?* It doesn't mean going around preaching the truth at the top of your voice (perish the thought!). It doesn't even mean muttering what you think in an undertone. It simply means: *not saying what you don't think,* and that includes not whispering, not opening your mouth, not raising your hand, not casting your vote, not feigning a smile, not lending your presence, not standing up, and not cheering.

We all work in different fields and move in different walks of life. Those who work in the humanities and all who are studying find themselves much more profoundly and inextricably involved in lying and participating in the lie—they are fenced about by layer after layer of lies. In the technical sciences it can be more ingeniously avoided, but even so one cannot escape daily entering some door, attending some meeting, putting one's signature to something or undertaking some obligation which is a cowardly submission to the lie. The lie surrounds us at work, on our way to work, in our leisure pursuits—in everything we see, hear, and read.

And just as varied as the forms of the lie are the forms of rejecting it. Whoever steels his heart and opens his eyes to the tentacles of the lie will in each situation, every day and every hour, realize what he must do.

Jan Palach burned himself to death.* That was an extreme sacrifice. Had it not been an isolated case it would have roused Czechoslovakia to action. As an isolated case it will simply go down in history. But not so

* On January 16, 1969, Palach, a student at Charles University, committed suicide through self-immolation in Wenceslas Square to protest the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968.

much is demanded of everyone—of you and me. Nor do we have to go out and face the flamethrowers breaking up demonstrations. All we have to do is *breathe.* All we have to do is not lie.

And nobody need be "first," because there are already many hundreds of "firsts," it is only because of their quietness that we do not notice them (especially those suffering for their religion, and it is fitting that they work as cleaners and caretakers). I can point to several dozen people from the very nucleus of the intelligentsia who have been living this way for a long time, for *years!* And they are still alive. And their families haven't died out. And they still have a roof over their heads. And food on the table.

Yes, it is a terrible thought! In the beginning the holes in the filter are so narrow, so very narrow: can a person with so many needs really squeeze through such a narrow opening? Let me reassure him: it is only that way at the entrance, at the very beginning. Very soon, not far along, the holes slacken and relax their grip, and eventually cease to grip you altogether. Yes, of course! It will cost you canceled dissertations, annuled degrees, demotions, dismissals, expulsions, sometimes even deportations. But you will not be cast into flames. Or crushed by a tank. And you will still have food and shelter.

This path is the safest and most accessible of all the paths open to us for the average man in the street. But it is also the most effective! Only we, knowing our system, can imagine what will happen when thousands and tens of thousands of people take this path—how our country will be purified and transformed without shots or bloodshed.

But this path is also the most moral: we shall be commencing this liberation and purification with *our own souls.* Before we purify the country we shall have purified ourselves. And this is the only correct historical order: for what is the good of purifying our country's air if we ourselves remain dirty?

People will say: how unfair on the young! After all, if you don't utter the obligatory lie at your social science exam, you'll be failed and expelled from your institute, and your education and life will be disrupted.

One of the articles in the present collection discusses the problem of whether we have correctly assessed the best directions to take in science and are doing what is necessary to follow them. Be that as it may, educational damage is not the greatest damage one can suffer in life. Damage to the soul and corruption of the soul, to which we carelessly assent from our earliest years, are far more irreparable.

Unfair on the young? But whose is the future if not theirs? Who do we expect to form the sacrificial elite? For whose sake do we agonize over the future? We are already old. If they themselves do not build an honest society, they will never see it at all.

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The Parallel Polis*
(1978, 1987)

VÁCLAV BENDA

Charter 77 has at least two remarkable achievements to its credit: it has gathered together a broad spectrum of political opinion and civic attitudes; and it has managed to remain legal. It has paid for these achievements by finding itself, from the outset, in a rather schizophrenic situation. On the one hand, despite deep differences in the principles behind their criticism and even deeper ones in their notions about how

* This essay (the first part of the text reproduced here) was circulated in samizdat in early 1978. Benda was arrested shortly thereafter for his involvement with VONS (The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted), an organization founded to aid those persecuted by state authorities (modeled on the Polish KOR). The second part of this essay (as the well the essay by Kantůrková) was written in response to inquiries by the scholar Gordon Skilling. In preparing his book *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Skilling asked a number of the prominent signatories of Charter 77 and other dissidents to respond to a series of questions related to themes raised in Benda's original essay. These questions included: (1) Do you think the term "independent society" is relevant and meaningful under present conditions in your country? (2) If so, what would you include as being essential features of an "independent society"? (3) What are the immediate purposes of the independent activities and organizations thus conceived? and (4) What are the implications and possible consequences of such an independent society? The responses were received during 1986–87. Along with the responses reproduced here by Benda and Kantůrková, the sixteen additional responses can be found in *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia*, edited by H. Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson.

change might be brought about, everyone takes a very dim view of the present political system and how it works. On the other hand, we behave as though we had failed to notice that the claims the regime makes about its own good intentions, and the laws that appear to limit its totality, are merely propagandistic camouflage. This tactic of taking the authorities at their word is, in itself, a shrewd ploy. Nevertheless, with all due respect to shrewdness, such an approach cannot bridge the gap between the positions mentioned above.

Charter 77 managed, at least temporarily and quite effectively, to eliminate this schism by stressing moral and ethical attitudes over political ones. Today this solution no longer works, and the original dilemma has returned in an even more pressing form. The reasons for this are roughly the following:

1. The death of Professor Patočka, who was unquestionably the *spiritus movens* of this solution.
2. The regime has finally realised that its virulent campaign has transformed a political problem into a moral one and that it has thus unwittingly accepted our choice of weapons. From that moment on the official media have fallen silent on the subject of the Charter, and the regime has limited itself to acts of strangulation in the dark. The official term for it is "whittling away at the edges."
3. The moral attitude was postulated abstractly, without raising any concrete issues or aims. An abstract moral stance, however, is merely a gesture; it may be terribly effective at the time, but it cannot be sustained for more than a few weeks or months. Proof of this is a phenomenon familiar to Charter signatories: the ecstatic sensation of liberation caused by signing the Charter gradually gave way to disillusionment and deep skepticism.

Without underestimating the importance of the first two points, I feel that the third is decisive, and sufficient in itself to create a problem. I am therefore suggesting a strategy that should gradually lead us out of the blind alley we are in today. This strategy can be summarized in two phrases: what unifies and drives us must continue to be a sense of *moral commitment and mission;* and this drive should be given a place and a perspective in the creation of a *parallel polis.*

The moral justification of a citizen's right and duty of a citizen to participate in the affairs of a community (affairs that are "political" in the broadest sense of the word) is beyond all doubt. This was the source of the Charter's public mandate, and at first, it was enough to overcome the differences of opinion within the Charter. It was a guarantee of unity, tolerance, cooperation, and, to a certain extent, persistence. Moreover this moral stance is so closely associated with the Charter in the eyes of the public and most of the signatories that any other formula could legitimately lay claim to continuity only with great difficulty. I am not asking, therefore, *whether* we should proceed from a moral basis, but *how* to make that aspect inspiring and mobilizing once more, and how to ensure that its influence will persist. I am asking what *kind* of specific efforts or "positive" program can derive its energy from that morality in the future.

A citizen may certainly see there is a moral commitment involved in challenging an evil political power and trying to destroy it. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, such a commitment is suicidal, and cannot hope for public support in any rational ethical system. Likewise, a citizen may feel morally obliged to size up the situation realistically and try to bring about at least partial improvements through compromise and reform. But given the ethics of the present regime, we cannot expect that the moral motivations of such behaviour will generally be appreciated, or be in any way morally appealing.

There is a third way of ameliorating conditions in the community (*obec*). Most structures that are connected, in one way or another, with the life of the community (i.e., to political life) are either inadequate or harmful. I suggest that we join forces in creating, slowly but surely, parallel structures that are capable, to a limited degree at least, of supplementing the generally beneficial and necessary functions that are missing in the existing structures, and where possible, to use those existing structures, to humanize them.

This plan will satisfy both the "reformists" and the "radicals." It need not lead to a direct conflict with the regime, yet it harbors no illusions that "cosmetic changes" can make any difference. Moreover it leaves open the key question of the system's viability. Even if such structures were only partially successful, they would bring pressure to bear on the official structures, which would either collapse (if you accept the view of the radicals) or regenerate themselves in a useful way (if you accept the reformist position).

Both wings will object because this plan reeks of the movement to "enlighten the masses" and it is politically naïve. Yet here we all are in the Charter, and the Charter is an undeniably naïve act, politically speaking, as are all attempts to base one's actions on morality. In any case my suggestion comes directly from the present form of Charter 77, which grew out of actions taken to defend parallel structures that already existed (the Second Culture), and which devotes much of its efforts to "humanizing" existing official structures (like the legislative system) by reinterpreting their meaning. Official politicians should recall that it was they, in the end, who brought the community to its present state and that the decent thing to do would be to rethink either their political beliefs, or their notion of what is and what is not politically naïve. There is no third way.

Perhaps it is beyond our powers to implement this plan. Nevertheless it is realistic in the sense that it has already worked. Here are two examples that are at once remarkable, and yet very different. Parallel cultural structures today undeniably exist, and they are a positive phenomenon. In some areas, like literature, and to some extent in popular music and the plastic arts, the parallel culture overshadows the lifeless, official culture. A phenomenon just as undeniable (and negative, though more functional and more human) is the parallel economy, based on systematic theft, corruption, and "favors." Under the shiny surface of official economics this parallel economy is a factor in most consumer relations, and also in industrial and trade relations as well.

Here, in brief and in no particular order, are the details of my plan:

(a) This point is the preamble to all the others. Our legal system is one of the worst in the world, because it exists solely for propagandistic purposes and for that reason is extremely vague and completely lacking in any legal guarantees. At the same time, and for the very same reasons, this allows it to be interpreted in a very liberal way. We must systematically exploit this discrepancy, and we must be prepared at any time for it to be used systematically against us. The transition from a totalitarian to a liberal system would mean a transition from the principle of "whatever is not expressly permitted is forbidden" to the principle of "whatever is not expressly forbidden is permitted." This can be accomplished only by continually testing the limits of what is permitted, and by occupying the newly won positions with great energy.

(b) So far, the Second Culture is the most developed and dynamic parallel structure. It should serve as a model for other areas and, at the

same time, all available means must be deployed to support its development, especially in neglected areas like literary criticism, cultural journalism, theater, and film.

(c) A parallel structure of education and scientific and scholarly life has already established a certain tradition, although in the past two years it has tended to stagnate. I consider the organization of a parallel educational system to be of utmost importance, both for personal reasons (I cannot harbor too many illusions about the chances of my children getting an official education) and for more general reasons. The "underground," which is by far the most numerous element in the Charter, has been able to overcome sectarianism and become political; but if this change is to last, we will clearly have to do "educational" work in these circles. I feel that here in particular there is room for us to aim high with a "maximalist" program.

(d) In its early stages the Charter was able to create a parallel information network that was functional and prompt and involved at least several tens of thousands of people. The gradual degeneration of that network, which unfortunately occurred faster than could be explained by the waning of the Charter's initial sensational impact, is considered one of the greatest failures of the Charter and one of the most critical symptoms, so far, of a crisis in its development.

The most important materials from Charter 77 were disseminated by direct, internal circulation (i.e., not via foreign radio broadcasts) to an estimated tens of thousands or even, in the case of the original declaration, to several hundred thousand people. Recently the number of those receiving Charter material has shrunk to hundreds, or at best to some thousands of citizens.

The contents and form of the information circulated will obviously be of key significance. The circulation of information must be considered as important as the actual preparation of the material. Everyone who complains today about the lack of information should feel obliged to circulate the information they do receive more effectively.

The informational network so created must be used regularly. Long periods of inactivity are more dangerous than overloading it, because this leads to loss of interest and the stagnation of connections already established.

Close to the sources, effectiveness is more important than politeness. It is essential to pass information on to places where its further dissemination is assured. I would rather see some "prominent" person informed of

something second hand than have the flow of information clogged, thus limiting it to a narrow circle of people.

There is an urgent need to improve the flow of information to groups outside Prague. It is even more urgent for these groups to establish mutual connections and create autonomous information networks of their own. Here, too, the most important factor in deciding who shall be given the information is whether or not that person can type.

In the future, we will have to consider using other means of reproduction besides the typewriter. A thorough analysis of the legal aspects of this problem should be prepared, and the possibilities of using such technologies as photocopying should be explored.

At the moment, the tasks facing us in the parallel economy are unimaginable, but though our opportunities are limited, the need to exploit them is urgent. The regime treats the economy as a key means of arbitrarily manipulating citizens and, at the same time, it regulates it as strictly as possible. We therefore have to rely on strictly confidential accounting practices (any other kind would cross the line into illegal activity), and we must develop a wide base for charitable and other support activities. Our community ought to be based on a system of mutual guarantees that are both moral and marerial. To demonstrate the morality and disinterestedness of our own motives by ostentatiously ignoring material factors is, in such circumstances, just as naïve and dangerous as informing the State Security forces about the details of our lives because we consider what we do to be honest and legal. We must resist this pressure by consistently turning to international solidarity for help, starting with support from individuals and organizations and ending with far more effective forms of scientific and cultural cooperation that would assure our relative independence from official economic structures (i.e., honoraria for works of art or scientific articles, stipends, etc.).

(e) The ground must be prepared for the creation and encouragement of parallel political (in the narrow sense of the word) structures. This would include a wide range of activities, from raising people's awareness of their civic responsibilities, to creating the proper conditions for political discussion and the formulation of theoretical points of view. It would also include support for concrete political currents and groupings.

As regards a parallel foreign policy, my premise is that the internationalization of any problem, though it may stand little chance of success, can do

no harm. Some of the parallel structures I have mentioned here, in economics and education, for instance, cannot hope to function, in the beginning at least, without support from abroad. Publicity for our efforts will provide protection against arbitrary actions by the regime and, for the majority of citizens, it is also the main source of information (foreign radio and TV).

No less important is mutual cooperation between related trends in other eastern bloc countries. In decades past almost every country in that bloc has paid dearly for the lack of such cooperation. At the moment publicity for what we are doing is quite insignificant and our cooperation with parallel movements inside the bloc has always been painfully inadequate. We must immediately create a team to investigate the reasons for such inadequacies and propose specific remedies.

The individual parallel structures will be connected with the Charter in varying degrees. Some will become an integral part of it; others will be midwived and wetnursed by the Charter; yet others the Charter will provide with a guarantee of legality. The parallel structures so formed will go beyond the framework of the Charter in various ways and sooner or later they must become autonomous, not only because they don't fit into the Charter's original form and mission, but because were they not to become autonomous, we would be building a ghetto rather than a parallel polis.

Even so, the Charter ought not to limit its involvement in such initiatives in any fundamental way, for by doing so, it would shift its focus from civic activity to merely monitoring such activity, and it would thus lose most of its moral energy. For the future, we will have to accept the fact that we will probably find it easier to agree on a common starting point for our efforts than on any external limitations to them. A citizens' initiative like the Charter will inevitably overflow into related initiatives and, because it is a free association, it has no means authoritatively to establish its own limits. The Charter was, is, and will continue to be based on the confidence that individual groups of signatories will responsibly avoid actions unacceptable to other groups, or that would undermine the original unity and solidarity in the Charter.

Charter 77 must continue to fulfill its proper purpose, namely to compile basic documents which draw attention to denial of human rights and suggest ways of correcting the situation. Documents should appear at the very least at two-month intervals. They ought to be addressed not only to the authorities, but also—and above all—to our fellow citizens. They

should therefore deal with genuinely urgent problems. They should not be inordinately long and they should be sufficiently comprehensible even for a lay public, avoiding legal or specialist jargon.

If our aim is to combat the general feeling of futility and hopelessness, rather than contributing to it, we must try to learn from our failure to hold a dialogue with the regime. That means going even further. There is nothing to stop us from presenting, in addition to our usual demands for institutional change, proposals for parallel civic activities that would enable improvements to be made in the given state of affairs. If producing documents ceases to be the sole aim and comes to be considered as merely one aspect of a more persistent effort to investigate the causes of the our present misery and to suggest ways of rectification, the Charter 77 is really in no danger of degenerating and becoming a mere producer of dry, rustling papers. Such an approach would represent the most natural transition to the plan, here presented, to create a parallel polis.

I shall begin with a personal reminiscence. None of my essays has been so frequently quoted, both approvingly and polemically, and none has been the source of so many inspired slogans, as the one entitled "The Parallel Polis." At the same time, none of my essays was more improvised. When the "second crisis" of Charter 77 took place (the first, in the spring of 1977, was related to Patočka's death and other events, and the rest, from the third to the nth, happen with iron regularity almost every year without arousing much attention) I was given the honor of taking part in a meeting of the Charter 77 "brain trust" which met to study further opportunities and outlooks for the movement. With the zeal of a newcomer, I complied with the general instructions (I was the only one who did, as it turned out) and prepared a discussion paper, which was essentially the text now known as "The Parallel Polis." At the same time the need to face up to a real crisis and real doubts led me to adopt an unambiguously optimistic outlook. Because my contribution to Charter 77 at the time was largely technical and only incidentally intellectual, my paper was by and large a report on very down-to-earth possibilities.

In the . . . years since then, even my most audacious expectations have been considerably surpassed. Thank God for that, although it is also true

that for the most part we are only limping far behind the far more impressive developments in Poland. Today it is perhaps no longer necessary to show that the parallel polis is possible: time has shown that even in the spheres of "parallel foreign policy" (which most of my critics considered an arbitrary hypothesis introduced more for the sake of logical completeness) and of "parallel economics" (which even I conceived in a largely negative sense, in terms of the black market, theft, bribery and other phenomena that go along with a centrally directed economy) many things are realizable that neither we nor the Poles even dared dream about ten years ago.

I don't want to turn this essentially positive answer to the question: "Is it possible?" into a celebration of my own foresight and our mutual merits. There have been successes and failures; there was progress and regression. We wasted our energies almost everywhere, naïvely allowing ourselves to be outflanked by repressions or to be bogged down in internal controversies. In almost every sphere, we remained far behind what was possible, even considering all the unfavorable conditions that prevailed. In one area we failed catastrophically: independent education. There were and still are different attempts to do something about it, but all of them have been marred by an excessive exclusivity (not only regarding the circle of participants, but chiefly in the form and content of the courses of study), considerable vulnerability to repressions and a lack of clear-sighted, responsible generosity.

Perhaps this last failure was inevitable. Young people are caught in the tough totalitarian network of predetermined possibilities, obligations to work from a tender age and compulsory military service (for men). Given the total destruction of the family, there is not really a great deal of space for maneuvering here. Let us take a closer look at our school system—and at the educational system in general, where systematic regression is taking place far more rapidly than in any other sphere of social life, and where even the basic totalitarian principle of dispensing advantages and discrimination is becoming largely imaginary, because there are hardly any real advantages left to dispense, and where discrimination is beginning to function as a defense against infection by stupidity. (Here is persuasive proof of the interdependence of education and tradition: as soon as fools are artificially included in the chain of tradition, nothing but stupidity can any longer be passed down). This failure may prove to be a fateful one both for citizens or oppositional movements, and for our whole national community.

Even today bitter problems related to the changing generations are arising in the Charter, in the Church and in independent culture. Unfortunately these problems differ from the ancient generational conflicts in that the rising generation is not marked by a healthy, or even an unhealthy self-confidence, a desire to rebel and take its proper place, but rather by a tendency to declare itself inadequate and place all the blame for that inadequacy on the preceding generation (a conclusion that in a practical respect is just, but in its rejection of the human condition and shared responsibility, deeply godless).

Then, of course, the future presents us with the threat of absolute destruction in a nuclear catastrophe, in economic or ecological collapse, in the perfect and ultimate triumph of totalitarianism. I personally think that a no less effective, exceptionally painful and in the short term practically irreparable way of eliminaring the human race or of individual nations would be a decline into barbarism, the abandonment of reason and learning, the loss of traditions and memory. The ruling regime—partly intentionally, partly thanks to its essentially nihilistic nature—has done everything it can to achieve that goal. The aim of independent citizens movements that try to create a parallel polis must be precisely the opposite: we must not be discouraged by previous failures, and we must consider the area of schooling and education as one of our main priorities.

And now some terminological clarifications, and concretely, an explanation of why I used the term "parallel polis" and why I consider this term even today as much more appropriate than "the underground," the "Second Culture," "independent culture," "alternative culture" or whatever other terms have been suggested. My arguments are directly related to both elements of the phrase. The program I once sketched out consisted neither in some sectarian or elitist exclusivity of a group or ghetto of people who "live in truth," nor in a one-sided attempt to preserve some preferred values, whether they be literary, musical, philosophical or religious. If this program gave unequivocal priority to something, it was the preservation or the renewal of the national community (*společenství*) in the widest sense of the word—along with the defense of all the values, institutions and material conditions to which the existence of such a community is bound. This, then, is where the word *"polis"* comes in, or perhaps "structures." It is also where doubts come in about whether terms like "underground" or "culture" represent an excessive narrowing of the intellectual, social, or thematic perspective.

As far as the appropriate adjective is concerned, it is obvious that a community (*obec*) created with such universal claims cannot completely ignore the official social structures and systematically remain separate from them (this is reflected in the more extreme aspects of the ideology of the underground) nor can it merely reject them and be their negative image (as the words "opposition," "second" and to a certain extent even "alternative" and "independent" suggest). The adjective "parallel" seemed, and still seems, more appropriate than other, more categorical solutions. It stresses variety, but not absolute independence, for a parallel course can be maintained only with a certain mutual respect and consideration. Furthermore it does not rule out the possibility that parallel courses may sometimes converge or cross each other (in geometry only at infinity, in practical life, however, much more frequently). Finally, it is a global characteristic, not merely local. For example, there is obviously no relevant official counterweight to parallel philosophy or theology, just as in the foreseeable future there is not likely to be a parallel counterweight to military power. The global nature of "parallelness," in my opinion, bridges over these disproportions and opens the door to a merging of both communities (*obcí*), and even more, to the peaceful dominance of the community anchored in truth over the community based on the mere manipulation of power.

As I have already said, all concrete, tactical tasks, all "small-scale work" involved in creating the "parallel polis" are, for me, connected with the renewal of the national community (*společenství*) in the widest sense of the word. For the main principle of totalitarian control is the utter destruction, the atomization of this and every other community (*společenství*)—replacing them with a paramilitary pseudoparty or, more probably, with a perfectly subordinated, perfectly sterile life-threatening party apparatus. The iron curtain does not just exist between the East and the West: it also separates individual nations in the East, individual regions, individual towns and villages, individual factories, individual families, and even the individuals within those entities from each other. Psychologists might even study the extent to which such an iron curtain has artificially divided various spheres of consciousness within each individual. In any case it is clear that we have far more precise and up-to-date information available about Australia than we do about events in a neighboring part of the city.

To tear down or corrode these miniature iron curtains, to break through the communications and social blockade, to return to truth and

justice, to a meaningful order of values, to value once more the inalienability of human dignity and the necessity for a sense of human community (*pospolitost*) in mutual love and responsibility—these, in my opinion, are the present goals of the parallel polis. In concrete terms this means taking over for the use of the parallel polis every space that state power has temporarily abandoned or which it has never occurred to it to occupy in the first place. It means winning over for the support of common aims (taking great care, however, to insure that the usual proscriptions of state power are not only not brought down on it prematurely, but that they are held off for as long as possible) everything alive in society and its culture in the broadest sense of the word. It means winning over anything that has managed somehow to survive the disfavor of the times (e.g., the Church) or that was able, despite the unfavorable times, to come into being (e.g., various youth movements, of which the most articulate is the underground).

The point is that the totalitarian regime is subject to a strange dialectic. On the one hand, its claim is total—i.e., it absolutely denies freedom and tries systematically to eliminate every sphere where freedom exists. On the other hand it has proved incapable, in practical terms, (those who believe in the divine creation, or who at least give precedence to the richness of life as against the poverty of ideology, consider this incapacity to be intrinsic and irremediable) of realizing this claim—that is, of permanently preventing the constant creation of new centers of freedom.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the natural resistance of life to totalitarianism, and the deliberate expansion of the space in which the parallel polis can exist. The former is a cluster of flowers that has grown in a place accidentally sheltered from the killing winds of totalitarianism and easily destroyed when those winds change direction. The latter is a trench whose elimination depends strictly on a calculated move by the state power to destroy it. Given the time and the means available, only a certain number of trenches can be eliminated. If, at the same time, the parallel polis is able to produce more such trenches than it loses, a situation arises that is mortally dangerous for the regime: it is a blow at the very heart of its power—that is, the possibility of intervening anywhere, without limitations. The mission of the parallel polis is constantly to conquer new territory, to make its parallelness constantly more substantial and more present. Politically, this means to stake out clear

limits for totalitarian power, to make it more difficult for it to maneuver.

Even in the apparent nonhistoricity of the Czechoslovakian situation, much has changed [since 1978]. State power has not lost any of its will to totality and the repressions have certainly not become milder, but their psychological effect has essentially changed. In the mid-1970s the persecution of a handful of people was enough to frighten and warn off thousands of others. Today every political trial is a moral challenge for dozens of other citizens who feel a responsibility for taking the place of those who are temporarily silenced. As soon as this reaches a certain level, the parallel polis can obviously be eliminated only by totally destroying it, or at least by decimating the entire nation: a perfect example of this is the evolution of the Polish situation after the declaration of the state of war.

At the same time, however, we come to the first paradox here, connected with the basic and, so far, little understood mysteries of totality. From the other side, it is probably impossible for the parallel polis to destroy, replace or peacefully transform (humanize, democratize, reform, or whatever the other terms for it are) totalitarian power. I have no intention here of analyzing the obvious theological aspects of the problem. I would emphasize most strongly that this has nothing to do with the fact that we are unanimous in preferring nonviolent forms of struggle. Every antitotalitarian tendency worthy of the name (that is, that offers more than just another version of totalitarianism) is, in essence, aiming at the good of the polis, at genuine community (*společenství*), at justice and freedom.

Totalitarianism devotes all its strength, all its technical know-how, towards a single goal: the unimpeded exercise of absolute power. It is capable of the most bizarre tactical somersaults imaginable, but it can never, under any circumstances, admit that anything is more important, more sacrosanct, than "the leading role of the party." In August 1968, after the enemy invasion, there was a great deal of radicalism inside the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and a lot of heresy, but on one question an almost pathetic agreement prevailed: no matter what happened, and no matter if all the previous values were suddenly turned inside out, the party must under no circumstances go underground, become an opposition, give up its position of power.

Looking merely at the completely different set of values each side prefers, antitotalitarianism and totalitarianism are not equal adversaries in the struggle for power. Totalitarianism, concentrating all its efforts on this

struggle, must always win. The more headway the threats to it make, the more drastic means it chooses from its repertoire, which knows no limitations, to suppress that threat. There is no systematic doctrine capable of liquidating totalitarian power from within, or replacing it. That power, however, works consciously at the outer limits of its own possibilities: a single loose pebble can cause an avalanche, an accidental outburst of discontent in a factory, at a football match, in a village pub, is capable of shaking the foundations of the state. The important thing is the chance factor: totalitarian power can successfully block any apparent adversary, but it is almost helpless against its own subjects who foolishly and infectiously start working to bring about in practice the notion that they need not go on being mere subjects.

Even more important, however, is the social situation, the level to which the parallel polis has built itself up, in which these accidental (chance) events take place. Neither the Committee for Social Self-Defense (KOR) nor the Catholic Church brought the Polish Solidarnosc into being, but to a significant degree they shared in the formation of that movement.* Regarding Charter 77, I doubt that anyone thinks we are capable of starting a revolution. I suspect, however, that everyone realizes that should a revolutionary, or shall we merely say a dramatic situation arise, our voice—"where do we go from here and how?"—will not be insignificant and that we will have to discharge our responsibility (which we, after all, voluntarily assumed) in something more than mere idle chatter and vague declarations.

Which brings me to what I consider the long-range or strategic mission of the parallel polis, the one genuine way of evaluating and justifying this type of "small-scale work." My conclusion is based on several loosely related assumptions. Totalitarian power has extended the sphere of politics to include everything, including the faith, the thinking, and the conscience of the individual. The first responsibility of a Christian and a human being is therefore to oppose such an inappropriate demand of the political sphere, ergo to resist totalitarian power.

Turning to local conditions, the greatest amount of ingenuity, courage, or willingness to make sacrifices has so far not been enough to emancipate us from the sphere of totalitarian power. Afghanistan might become a

* KOR/Solidarity. See note on page 393.

turning point, yet precisely because of this infectious example, it is highly unlikely that the occupation armies will soon withdraw from that country. I am aware, and all of us here in central and eastern Europe are more or less aware that the possibilities of a parallel polis and of any other kind of opposition are strictly limited, and that successfully overcoming those limits is conditional upon the world situation. Totalitarian power is a part of our fate (and perhaps God's punishment for our sins), and not just a mere parasite that can be eliminated by decisive action on our part.

At the same time, however, history teaches us that irregularly, but with iron necessity, those "favorable global constellations" come about, in which even small nations cease to be mere vassals of their fate and have the opportunity to become its active captains. In this century such an opportunity has presented itself to Czechoslovakia at least three times: in 1938, 1948 and 1968. Each of these historical opportunities were different, but in each case they were lost or squandered in the most painful and lamentable ways. Despite the situational differences, I observe a common factor in all of them: not once could the failure be blamed on our peoples who, on the contrary, demonstrated an exceptional amount of civic responsibility and willingness to sacrifice themselves. The failure was always that of their political (and military) leadership. We can be certain that we will find ourselves in similar suspicious situations in the future, and it is only a guess whether this will be tomorrow or in twenty years. Given the profound deterioration of our political leadership and of civic culture in general, we may with some reason predict that the next chance will be missed and lost as well. My private opinion is that the cardinal, strategic or long-term task of the parallel polis is to prove this gloomy prediction wrong.

In the diction of our opponents, this task will consist in the "formation of cadres": people who are sufficiently well-known and who enjoy sufficient authority to be able, in a crisis, to take the place of the degenerate political leadership and who will be capable of presenting, and consistently defending, a program that will liquidate the principles of totality. This last statement, which is perhaps too simplified and declarative, requires more detailed commentary. It is in no way to be interpreted as a scheme, either hidden or overt, for seizing power. From what I have said before, it should be clear enough why the parallel polis would be incapable of carrying out anything like that, and why it would not even try.

As for the changes in personnel suggested by my references to "cadres," I see a far greater likelihood of difficulties than success. If by some miracle my good friend Václav Havel were to become General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, I would immediately become his toughest opponent. Ontologically, because freedom granted on the installment plan, and as a favor by the totalitarian regime, would have little to do with real freedom; practically, because miracles are a mere exception to the orderly course of things in the world. Hence Václav Havel would either very quickly lose his position as general secretary, or he would equally quickly adapt to the modus operandi of the totalitarian system, even though he might introduce many interesting and dramatic new features. Given his human decency, I have no doubt that his would be the former case. I shall, however, let this remark stand as an answer to the constant speculations about Gorbachev and the tiresome, often capricious questions on that theme.

As I see it, the strategic aim of the parallel polis should be rather the growth, or the renewal, of civic and political culture—and along with it, an identical structuring of society, creating bonds of responsibility and fellow-feeling. The issue is no more and no less that this: when the next crisis comes, the next moment of decision about the future of our nations, the good will of most of society (and I repeat: this has so far been incredibly good and always brutally disappointed) will find a sufficiently clear and a sufficiently authoritative articulation. In other words our political leadership should be at the same level of thinking as society, and if it is not, so much the worse for the leadership.

Let me give an example that is now ancient and has ceased to be painful. The proclamation: "Give us arms, we paid for them!" in 1938 is mere propaganda if it is not followed up with a concrete plan as to where these arms are to be distributed and under whose command they are to be used. If there is any justification for the existence of an army, then their leadership, at a moment when the civilian politicians have betrayed their trust and the nation is in mortal danger, will not resort to theatrical suicides, but to a military coup—which is my answer to the question regarding *what* arms and under *whose* leadership.

Modern totalitarianism is held in check by two great limitations: it is intrinsically suspicious of, and even hostile to, any genuine authority, and it is capable of decisive action only in defense of its own power pre-

rogatives. It is this that gives the parallel polis its strategic location and its long-range task: at a moment of crisis, it is our clear, unequivocal words that will be heard, not the confused and defensive stammerings of the government. For the sake of completeness, I should add that the appropriate clarity, courage, and authority is not something automatic, or a gift from heaven; it must be earned in hard, "small-scale work" and also with the appropriate sacrifices. And if, in the next moment of potential choice we should fail, this would be far more at the expense of Charter 77 and the parallel polis than it would be at the expense of our miserable government. We have taken up arms; now we shall have to fight!

28

The Power of the Powerless* (1978)

VÁCLAV HAVEL

To the memory of Jan Patočka

I

A specter is haunting eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called "dissent." This specter has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting. It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power, eliminating all expressions of nonconformity. What is more, the system has become so ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented within its official structures.

Who are these so-called dissidents? Where does their point of view come from, and what importance does it have? What is the significance of the "independent initiatives" in which "dissidents" collaborate, and what real chances do such initiatives have of success? Is it appropriate to refer to "dissidents" as an opposition? If so, what exactly is such an opposition within the framework of this system? What does it do? What role does it play in society? What are its hopes and on what are they based? Is it

* See note on page 26. Two excerpts from this essay appear in this volume. Part II appears in Section I. Parts I and III–XII appear here.

within the power of the "dissidents"—as a category of subcitizen outside the power establishment—to have any influence at all on society and the social system? Can they actually change anything?

I think that an examination of these questions—an examination of the potential of the "powerless"—can only begin with an examination of the nature of power in the circumstances in which these powerless people operate. . . .

III*

The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean?

I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onions and carrots. He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble. He could be reproached for not having the proper decoration in his window; someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life "in harmony with society," as they say.

Obviously the greengrocer is indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan on exhibit; he does not put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses. This, of course, does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to anyone. The slogan is

* Section II appears in the first section of this volume.

really a sign, and as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace." This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers. The slogan's real meaning, therefore, is rooted firmly in the greengrocer's existence. It reflects his vital interests. But what are those vital interests?

Let us take note: if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient," he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth. The greengrocer would be embarrassed and ashamed to put such an unequivocal statement of his own degradation in the shop window, and quite naturally so, for he is a human being and thus has a sense of his own dignity. To overcome this complication, his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction. It must allow the greengrocer to say, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is ideology.

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them. As the repository of something suprapersonal and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position and their inglorious *modus vivendi,* both from the world and from themselves. It is a very pragmatic but, at the same time, an apparently dignified way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side. It is directed toward people and toward God. It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization and their adaptation to the status quo. It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. The primary excusatory function of

ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.

The smaller a dictatorship and the less stratified by modernization the society under it, the more directly the will of the dictator can be exercised. In other words, the dictator can employ more or less naked discipline, avoiding the complex processes of relating to the world and of self-justification which ideology involves. But the more complex the mechanisms of power become, the larger and more stratified the society they embrace, and the longer they have operated historically, the more individuals must be connected to them from outside, and the greater the importance attached to the ideological excuse. It acts as a kind of bridge between the regime and the people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime. This explains why ideology plays such an important role in the post-totalitarian system: that complex machinery of units, hierarchies, transmission belts, and indirect instruments of manipulation which ensure in countless ways the integrity of the regime, leaving nothing to chance, would be quite simply unthinkable without ideology acting as its all-embracing excuse and as the excuse for each of its parts.

IV

Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, toward the fulfillment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline. While life ever strives to create new and improbable structures, the post-totalitarian system contrives to force life into its most probable states. The aims of the system reveal its most essential characteristic to be introversion, a movement toward being ever more completely and unreservedly itself, which means that the radius of its influence is continually widening as well. This system serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it. Anything beyond this, that is to say, anything which leads people to overstep their predetermined roles, is regarded by the system as an attack upon itself.

And in this respect it is correct: every instance of such transgression is a genuine denial of the system. It can be said, therefore, that the inner aim of the post-totalitarian system is not mere preservation of power in the hands of a ruling clique, as appears to be the case at first sight. Rather, the social phenomenon of self-preservation is subordinated to something higher, to a kind of blind automatism which drives the system. No matter what position individuals hold in the hierarchy of power, they are not considered by the system to be worth anything in themselves, but only as things intended to fuel and serve this automatism. For this reason, an individual's desire for power is admissible only insofar as its direction coincides with the direction of the automatism of the system.

Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life. It pretends that the requirements of the system derive from the requirements of life. It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality.

The post-totalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on. This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing.

Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough

for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, *are* the system.

V

We have seen that the real meaning of the greengrocer's slogan has nothing to do with what the text of the slogan actually says. Even so, this real meaning is quite clear and generally comprehensible because the code is so familiar: the greengrocer declares his loyalty (and he can do no other if his declaration is to be accepted) in the only way the regime is capable of hearing; that is, by accepting the prescribed ritual, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game. In doing so, however, he has himself become a player in the game, thus making it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place.

If ideology was originally a bridge between the system and the individual as an individual, then the moment he steps on to this bridge it becomes at the same time a bridge between the system and the individual as a component of the system. That is, if ideology originally facilitated (by acting outwardly) the constitution of power by serving as a psychological excuse, then from the moment that excuse is accepted, it constitutes power inwardly, becoming an active component of that power. It begins to function as the principal instrument of ritual communication *within* the system of power.

The whole power structure (and we have already discussed its physical articulation) could not exist at all if there were not a certain metaphysical order binding all its components together, interconnecting them and subordinating them to a uniform method of accountability, supplying the combined operation of all these components with rules of the game, that is, with certain regulations, limitations, and legalities. This metaphysical order is fundamental to, and standard throughout, the entire power structure; it integrates its communication system and makes possible the internal exchange and transfer of information and instructions. It is rather like a collection of traffic signals and directional signs, giving the process shape and structure. This metaphysical order guarantees the inner coher-

ence of the totalitarian power structure. It is the glue holding it together, its binding principle, the instrument of its discipline. Without this glue the structure as a totalitarian structure would vanish; it would disintegrate into individual atoms chaotically colliding with one another in their unregulated particular interests and inclinations. The entire pyramid of totalitarian power, deprived of the element that binds it together, would collapse in upon itself, as it were, in a kind of material implosion.

As the interpretation of reality by the power structure, ideology is always subordinated ultimately to the interests of the structure. Therefore, it has a natural tendency to disengage itself from reality, to create a world of appearances, to become ritual. In societies where there is public competition for power and therefore public control of that power, there also exists quite naturally public control of the way that power legitimates itself ideologically. Consequently, in such conditions there are always certain correctives that effectively prevent ideology from abandoning reality altogether. Under totalitarianism, however, these correctives disappear, and thus there is nothing to prevent ideology from becoming more and more removed from reality, gradually turning into what it has already become in the post-totalitarian system: a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudoreality.

Yet, as we have seen, ideology becomes at the same time an increasingly important component of power, a pillar providing it with both excusatory legitimacy and an inner coherence. As this aspect grows in importance, and as it gradually loses touch with reality, it acquires a peculiar but very real strength. It becomes reality itself, albeit a reality altogether self-contained, one that on certain levels (chiefly inside the power structure) may have even greater weight than reality as such. Increasingly, the virtuosity of the ritual becomes more important than the reality hidden behind it. The significance of phenomena no longer derives from the phenomena themselves, but from their locus as concepts in the ideological context. Reality does not shape theory, but rather the reverse. Thus power gradually draws closer to ideology than it does to reality; it draws its strength from theory and becomes entirely dependent on it. This inevitably leads, of course, to a paradoxical result: rather than theory, or rather ideology, serving power, power begins to serve ideology. It is as though ideology had appropriated power from power, as though it had become dictator itself. It

then appears that theory itself, ritual itself, ideology itself, makes decisions that affect people, and not the other way around.

If ideology is the principal guarantee of the inner consistency of power, it becomes at the same time an increasingly important guarantee of its continuity. Whereas succession to power in classical dictatorship is always a rather complicated affair (the pretenders having nothing to give their claims reasonable legitimacy, thereby forcing them always to resort to confrontations of naked power), in the post-totalitarian system power is passed on from person to person, from clique to clique, and from generation to generation in an essentially more regular fashion. In the selection of pretenders, a new "king-maker" takes part: it is ritual legitimation, the ability to rely on ritual, to fulfill it and use it, to allow oneself, as it were, to be borne aloft by it. Naturally, power struggles exist in the post-totalitarian system as well, and most of them are far more brutal than in an open society, for the struggle is not open, regulated by democratic rules, and subject to public control, but hidden behind the scenes. (It is difficult to recall a single instance in which the First Secretary of a ruling Communist Party has been replaced without the various military and security forces being placed at least on alert.) This struggle, however, can never (as it can in classical dictatorships) threaten the very essence of the system and its continuity. At most it will shake up the power structure, which will recover quickly precisely because the binding substance—ideology—remains undisturbed. No matter who is replaced by whom, succession is only possible against the backdrop and within the framework of a common ritual. It can never take place by denying that ritual.

Because of this dictatorship of the ritual, however, power becomes clearly anonymous. Individuals are almost dissolved in the ritual. They allow themselves to be swept along by it and frequently it seems as though ritual alone carries people from obscurity into the light of power. Is it not characteristic of the post-totalitarian system that, on all levels of the power hierarchy, individuals are increasingly being pushed aside by faceless people, puppets, those uniformed flunkeys of the rituals and routines of power?

The automatic operation of a power structure thus dehumanized and made anonymous is a feature of the fundamental automatism of this system. It would seem that it is precisely the diktats of this automatism which select people lacking individual will for the power structure, that it is

precisely the diktat of the empty phrase which summons to power people who use empty phrases as the best guarantee that the automatism of the post-totalitarian system will continue.

Western Sovietologists often exaggerate the role of individuals in the post-totalitarian system and overlook the fact that the ruling figures, despite the immense power they possess through the centralized structure of power, are often no more than blind executors of the system's own internal laws—laws they themselves never can, and never do, reflect upon. In any case, experience has taught us again and again that this automatism is far more powerful than the will of any individual; and should someone possess a more independent will, he must conceal it behind a ritually anonymous mask in order to have an opportunity to enter the power hierarchy at all. And when the individual finally gains a place there and tries to make his will felt within it, that automatism, with its enormous inertia, will triumph sooner or later, and either the individual will be ejected by the power structure like a foreign organism, or he will be compelled to resign his individuality gradually, once again blending with the automatism and becoming its servant, almost indistinguishable from those who preceded him and those who will follow. (Let us recall, for instance, the development of Husák* or Gomułka.†) The necessity of continually hiding behind and relating to ritual means that even the more enlightened members of the power structure are often obsessed with ideology. They are never able to plunge straight to the bottom of naked reality, and they always confuse it, in the final analysis, with ideological pseudoreality. (In my opinion, one of the reasons the Dubček‡ leadership lost control of the

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* Gustáv Husák replaced Alexander Dubček as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czecholslovakia (CPC) in April 1969 in the wake of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring. He is closely associated with the so-called "normalization" period of the 1970s and 1980s.

† Gomułka. See notes on pages 380 and 412.

‡ Alexander Dubček replaced Antonín Novotný as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPCz in 1968. He quickly became the symbol of the reform movement that had been developing throughout the 1960s. He was pressured by the Soviets and the Communist governments of other Warsaw Pact countries to crush the reform movement. After the Soviets invaded on August 21, 1968, he was arrested and taken to the USSR.

situation in 1968 was precisely because, in extreme situations and in final questions, its members were never capable of extricating themselves completely from the world of appearances.)

It can be said, therefore, that ideology, as that instrument of internal communication which assures the power structure of inner cohesion is, in the post-totalitarian system, something that transcends the physical aspects of power, something that dominates it to a considerable degree and, therefore, tends to assure its continuity as well. It is one of the pillars of the system's external stability. This pillar, however, is built on a very unstable foundation. It is built on lies. It works only as long as people are willing to live within the lie.

VI

Why in fact did our greengrocer have to put his loyalty on display in the shop window? Had he not already displayed it sufficiently in various internal or semipublic ways? At trade union meetings, after all, he had always voted as he should. He had always taken part in various competitions. He voted in elections like a good citizen. He had even signed the "anti-Charter." Why, on top of all that, should he have to declare his loyalty publicly? After all, the people who walk past his window will certainly not stop to read that, in the greengrocer's opinion, the workers of the world ought to unite. The fact of the matter is, they don't read the slogan at all, and it can be fairly assumed they don't even see it. If you were to ask a woman who had stopped in front of his shop what she saw in the window, she could certainly tell whether or not they had tomatoes today, but it is highly unlikely that she noticed the slogan at all, let alone what it said.

It seems senseless to require the greengrocer to declare his loyalty publicly. But it makes sense nevertheless. People ignore his slogan, but they do so because such slogans are also found in other shop windows, on lampposts, bulletin boards, in apartment windows, and on buildings; they are everywhere, in fact. They form part of the panorama of everyday life. Of course, while they ignore the details, people are very aware of that panorama as a whole. And what else is the greengrocer's slogan but a small component in that huge backdrop to daily life?

The greengrocer had to put the slogan in his window, therefore, not in

the hope that someone might read it or be persuaded by it, but to contribute, along with thousands of other slogans, to the panorama that everyone is very much aware of. This panorama, of course, has a subliminal meaning as well: it reminds people where they are living and what is expected of them. It tells them what everyone else is doing, and indicates to them what they must do as well, if they don't want to be excluded, to fall into isolation, alienate themselves from society, break the rules of the game, and risk the loss of their peace and tranquility and security.

The woman who ignored the greengrocer's slogan may well have hung a similar slogan just an hour before in the corridor of the office where she works. She did it more or less without thinking, just as our greengrocer did, and she could do so precisely because she was doing it against the background of the general panorama and with some awareness of it, that is, against the background of the panorama of which the greengrocer's shop window forms a part. When the greengrocer visits her office, he will not notice her slogan either, just as she failed to notice his. Nevertheless, their slogans are mutually dependent: both were displayed with some awareness of the general panorama and, we might say, under its diktat. Both, however, assist in the creation of that panorama, and therefore they assist in the creation of that diktat as well. The greengrocer and the office worker have both adapted to the conditions in which they live, but in doing so, they help to create those conditions. They do what is done, what is to be done, what must be done, but at the same time—by that very token—they confirm that it must be done in fact. They conform to a particular requirement and in so doing they themselves perpetuate that requirement. Metaphysically speaking, without the greengrocer's slogan the office worker's slogan could not exist, and vice versa. Each proposes to the other that something be repeated and each accepts the other's proposal. Their mutual indifference to each other's slogans is only an illusion: in reality, by exhibiting their slogans, each compels the other to accept the rules of the game and to confirm thereby the power that requires the slogans in the first place. Quite simply, each helps the other to be obedient. Both are objects in a system of control, but at the same time they are its subjects as well. They are both victims of the system and its instruments.

If an entire district town is plastered with slogans that no one reads, it is on the one hand a message from the district secretary to the regional secretary, but it is also something more: a small example of the principle

of social autototality at work. Part of the essence of the post-totalitarian system is that it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals, so they may participate in the common responsibility for it, so they may be pulled into and ensnared by it, like Faust by Mephistopheles. More than this: so they may create through their involvement a general norm and, thus, bring pressure to bear on their fellow citizens. And further: so they may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable and, ultimately, so they may—with no external urging—come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves, as a form of dropping out of society. By pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone an instrument of a mutual totality, the autototality of society.

Everyone, however, is in fact involved and enslaved, not only the greengrocers but also the prime ministers. Differing positions in the hierarchy merely establish differing degrees of involvement: the greengrocer is involved only to a minor extent, but he also has very little power. The prime minister, naturally, has greater power, but in return he is far more deeply involved. Both, however, are unfree, each merely in a somewhat different way. The real accomplice in this involvement, therefore, is not another person, but the system itself. Position in the power hierarchy determines the degree of responsibility and guilt, but it gives no one unlimited responsibility and guilt, nor does it completely absolve anyone. Thus the conflict between the aims of life and the aims of the system is not a conflict between two socially defined and separate communities; and only a very generalized view (and even that only approximative) permits us to divide society into the rulers and the ruled. Here, by the way, is one of the most important differences between the post-totalitarian system and classical dictatorships, in which this line of conflict can still be drawn according to social class. In the post-totalitarian system, this line runs de facto through each person, for everyone in his own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system. What we understand by the system is not, therefore, a social order imposed by one group upon another, but rather something which permeates the entire society and is a factor in shaping it,

something which may seem impossible to grasp or define (for it is in the nature of a mere principle), but which is expressed by the entire society as an important feature of its life.

The fact that human beings have created, and daily create, this self-directed system through which they divest themselves of their innermost identity is not therefore the result of some incomprehensible misunderstanding of history, nor is it history somehow gone off its rails. Neither is it the product of some diabolical higher will which has decided, for reasons unknown, to torment a portion of humanity in this way. It can happen and did happen only because there is obviously in modern humanity a certain tendency toward the creation, or at least the toleration, of such a system. There is obviously something in human beings which responds to this system, something they reflect and accommodate, something within them which paralyzes every effort of their better selves to revolt. Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary master-plan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's own failure as individuals.

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie. Each person somehow succumbs to a profane trivialization of his inherent humanity, and to utilitarianism. In everyone there is some willingness to merge with the anonymous crowd and to flow comfortably along with it down the river of pseudolife. This is much more than a simple conflict between two identities. It is something far worse: it is a challenge to the very notion of identity itself.

In highly simplified terms, it could be said that the post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society. Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social autototality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the

sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity? With their willingness to surrender higher values when faced with the trivializing temptations of modern civilization? With their vulnerability to the attractions of mass indifference? And in the end, is not the grayness and the emptiness of life in the post-totalitarian system only an inflated caricature of modern life in general? And do we not in fact stand (although in the external measures of civilization, we are far behind) as a kind of warning to the West, revealing to its own latent tendencies?

VII

Let us now imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth.

The bill is not long in coming. He will be relieved of his post as manager of the shop and transferred to the warehouse. His pay will be reduced. His hopes for a holiday in Bulgaria will evaporate. His children's access to higher education will be threatened. His superiors will harass him and his fellow workers will wonder about him. Most of those who apply these sanctions, however, will not do so from any authentic inner conviction but simply under pressure from conditions, the same conditions that once pressured the greengrocer to display the official slogans. They will persecute the greengrocer either because it is expected of them, or to demonstrate their loyalty, or simply as part of the general panorama, to which belongs an awareness that this is how situations of this sort are dealt with, that this, in fact, is how things are always done, particularly if one is not to become suspect oneself. The executors, therefore, behave essentially like everyone else, to a greater or lesser degree: as components of the post-totalitarian system, as agents of its automatism, as petty instruments of the social autototality.

Thus the power structure, through the agency of those who carry out the sanctions, those anonymous components of the system, will spew the greengrocer from its mouth. The system, through its alienating presence in people, will punish him for his rebellion. It must do so because the logic of its automatism and self-defense dictate it. The greengrocer has not committed a simple, individual offense, isolated in its own uniqueness, but something incomparably more serious. By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. He has broken through the exalted facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundations of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal. The principle must embrace and permeate everything. There are no terms whatsoever on which it can co-exist with living within the truth, and therefore everyone who steps out of line denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety.

This is understandable: as long as appearance is not confronted with reality, it does not seem to be appearance. As long as living a lie is not confronted with living the truth, the perspective needed to expose its mendacity is lacking. As soon as the alternative appears, however, it threatens the very existence of appearance and living a lie in terms of what they are, both their essence and their all-inclusiveness. And at the same time, it is utterly unimportant how large a space this alternative occupies: its power does not consist in its physical attributes but in the light it casts on those pillars of the system and on its unstable foundations. After all, the greengrocer was a threat to the system not because of any physical or actual power he had, but because his action went beyond itself, because it illuminated its surroundings and, of course, because of the incalculable consequences of that illumination. In the post-totalitarian system, therefore, living within the truth has more than a mere existential dimension (returning humanity to its inherent nature), or a noetic dimension (revealing reality as it is), or a moral dimension (setting an example for others). It also has an unambigu-

ous political dimension. If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth. This is why it must be suppressed more severely than anything else.

In the post-totalitarian system, truth in the widest sense of the word has a very special import, one unknown in other contexts. In this system, truth plays a far greater (and, above all, a far different) role as a factor of power, or as an outright political force. How does the power of truth operate? How does truth as a factor of power work? How can its power—as power—be realized?

VIII

Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response. Only against this background does living a lie make any sense: it exists *because* of that background. In its excusatory, chimerical rootedness in the human order, it is a response to nothing other than the human predisposition to truth. Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth.

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists. But this place is hidden and therefore, from the perspective of power, very dangerous. The complex ferment that takes place within it goes on in semidarkness, and by the time it finally surfaces into the light of day as an assortment of shocking surprises to the system, it is usually too late to cover them up in the usual fashion. Thus they create a situation in which the regime is confounded, invariably causing panic and driving it to react in inappropriate ways.

It seems that the primary breeding ground for what might, in the widest possible sense of the word, be understood as an opposition in the post-

totalitarian system is living within the truth. The confrontation between these opposition forces and the powers that be, of course, will obviously take a form essentially different from that typical of an open society or a classical dictatorship. Initially, this confrontation does not take place on the level of real, institutionalized, quantifiable power which relies on the various instruments of power, but on a different level altogether: the level of human consciousness and conscience, the existential level. The effective range of this special power cannot be measured in terms of disciples, voters, or soldiers, because it lies spread out in the fifth column of social consciousness, in the hidden aims of life, in human beings' repressed longing for dignity and fundamental rights, for the realization of their real social and political interests. Its power, therefore, does not reside in the strength of definable political or social groups, but chiefly in the strength of a potential, which is hidden throughout the whole of society, including the official power structures of that society. Therefore this power does not rely on soldiers of its own, but on the soldiers of the enemy as it were—that is to say, on everyone who is living within the lie and who may be struck at any moment (in theory, at least) by the force of truth (or who, out of an instinctive desire to protect their position, may at least adapt to that force). It is a bacteriological weapon, so to speak, utilized when conditions are ripe by a single civilian to disarm an entire division. This power does not participate in any direct struggle for power; rather, it makes its influence felt in the obscure arena of being itself. The hidden movements it gives rise to there, however, can issue forth (when, where, under what circumstances, and to what extent are difficult to predict) in something visible: a real political act or event, a social movement, a sudden explosion of civil unrest, a sharp conflict inside an apparently monolithic power structure, or simply an irrepressible transformation in the social and intellectual climate. And since all genuine problems and matters of critical importance are hidden beneath a thick crust of lies, it is never quite clear when the proverbial last straw will fall, or what that straw will be. This, too, is why the regime prosecutes, almost as a reflex action preventively, even the most modest attempts to live within the truth.

Why was Solzhenitsyn driven out of his own country? Certainly not because he represented a unit of real power, that is, not because any of the regime's representatives felt he might unseat them and take their place in government. Solzhenitsyn's expulsion was something else: a desperate

attempt to plug up the dreadful wellspring of truth, a truth which might cause incalculable transformations in social consciousness, which in turn might one day produce political debacles unpredictable in their consequences. And so the post-totalitarian system behaved in a characteristic way: it defended the integrity of the world of appearances in order to defend itself. For the crust presented by the life of lies is made of strange stuff. As long as it seals off hermetically the entire society, it appears to be made of stone. But the moment someone breaks through in one place, when one person cries out, "The emperor is naked!"—when a single person breaks the rules of the game, thus exposing it as a game—everything suddenly appears in another light and the whole crust seems then to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably.

When I speak of living within the truth, I naturally do not have in mind only products of conceptual thought, such as a protest or a letter written by a group of intellectuals. It can be any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation: anything from a letter by intellectuals to a workers' strike, from a rock concert to a student demonstration, from refusing to vote in the farcical elections to making an open speech at some official congress, or even a hunger strike, for instance. If the suppression of the aims of life is a complex process, and if it is based on the multifaceted manipulation of all expressions of life, then, by the same token, every free expression of life indirectly threatens the post-totalitarian system politically, including forms of expression to which, in other social systems, no one would attribute any potential political significance, not to mention explosive power.

The Prague Spring* is usually understood as a clash between two groups on the level of real power: those who wanted to maintain the system as it was and those who wanted to reform it. It is frequently forgotten, however, that this encounter was merely the final act and the inevitable consequence of a long drama originally played out chiefly in the theater of the spirit and the conscience of society. And that somewhere at the beginning of this drama, there were individuals who were willing to live

* The Prague Spring refers to the eight months of reforms undertaken in 1968 when Czechoslovakia attempted to fashion, in the popular slogan, "socialism with a human face." The movement was crushed in August of 1968 when the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary sent troops to invade the country.

within the truth, even when things were at their worst. These people had no access to real power, nor did they aspire to it. The sphere in which they were living the truth was not necessarily even that of political thought. They could equally have been poets, painters, musicians, or simply ordinary citizens who were able to maintain their human dignity. Today it is naturally difficult to pinpoint when and through which hidden, winding channel a certain action or attitude influenced a given milieu, and to trace the virus of truth as it slowly spread through the tissue of the life of lies, gradually causing it to disintegrate. One thing, however, seems clear: the attempt at political reform was not the cause of society's reawakening, but rather the final outcome of that reawakening.

I think the present also can be better understood in the light of this experience. The confrontation between a thousand Chartists and the post-totalitarian system would appear to be politically hopeless. This is true, of course, if we look at it through the traditional lens of the open political system, in which, quite naturally, every political force is measured chiefly in terms of the positions it holds on the level of real power. Given that perspective, a mini-party like the Charter would certainly not stand a chance. If, however, this confrontation is seen against the background of what we know about power in the post-totalitarian system, it appears in a fundamentally different light. For the time being, it is impossible to say with any precision what impact the appearance of Charter 77, its existence, and its work has had in the hidden sphere, and how the Charter's attempt to rekindle civic self-awareness and confidence is regarded there. Whether, when, and how this investment will eventually produce dividends in the form of specific political changes is even less possible to predict. But that, of course, is all part of living within the truth. As an existential solution, it takes individuals back to the solid ground of their own identity; as politics, it throws them into a game of chance where the stakes are all or nothing. For this reason it is undertaken only by those for whom the former is worth risking the latter, or who have come to the conclusion that there is no other way to conduct real politics in Czechoslovakia today. Which, by the way, is the same thing: this conclusion can be reached only by someone who is unwilling to sacrifice his own human identity to politics, or rather, who does not believe in a politics that requires such a sacrifice.

The more thoroughly the post-totalitarian system frustrates any rival alternative on the level of real power, as well as any form of politics inde-

pendent of the laws of its own automatism, the more definitively the center of gravity of any potential political threat shifts to the area of the existential and the prepolitical: usually without any conscious effort, living within the truth becomes the one natural point of departure for all activities that work against the automatism of the system. And even if such activities ultimately grow beyond the area of living within the truth (which means they are transformed into various parallel structures, movements, institutions, they begin to be regarded as political activity, they bring real pressure to bear on the official structures and begin in fact to have a certain influence on the level of real power), they always carry with them the specific hallmark of their origins. Therefore it seems to me that not even the so-called dissident movements can be properly understood without constantly bearing in mind this special background from which they emerge.

IX

The profound crisis of human identity brought on by living within a lie, a crisis which in turn makes such a life possible, certainly possesses a moral dimension as well; it appears, among other things, as a deep moral crisis in society. A person who has been seduced by the consumer value system, whose identity is dissolved in an amalgam of the accouterments of mass civilization, and who has no roots in the order of being, no sense of responsibility for anything higher than his own personal survival, is a demoralized person. The system depends on this demoralization, deepens it, is in fact a projection of it into society.

Living within the truth, as humanity's revolt against an enforced position, is, on the contrary, an attempt to regain control over one's own sense of responsibility. In other words, it is clearly a moral act, not only because one must pay so dearly for it, but principally because it is not self-serving: the risk may bring rewards in the form of a general amelioration in the situation, or it may not. In this regard, as I stated previously, it is an all-or-nothing gamble, and it is difficult to imagine a reasonable person embarking on such a course merely because he reckons that sacrifice today will bring rewards tomorrow, be it only in the form of general gratitude. (By the way, the representatives of power invariably come to terms with those

who live within the truth by persistently ascribing utilitarian motivations to them—a lust for power or fame or wealth—and thus they try, at least, to implicate them in their own world, the world of general demoralization.)

If living within the truth in the post-totalitarian system becomes the chief breeding ground for independent, alternative political ideas, then all considerations about the nature and future prospects of these ideas must necessarily reflect this moral dimension as a political phenomenon. (And if the revolutionary Marxist belief about morality as a product of the "superstructure" inhibits any of our friends from realizing the full significance of this dimension and, in one way or another, from including it in their view of the world, it is to their own detriment: an anxious fidelity to the postulates of that worldview prevents them from properly understanding the mechanisms of their own political influence, thus paradoxically making them precisely what they, as Marxists, so often suspect others of being—victims of "false consciousness.") The very special political significance of morality in the post-totalitarian system is a phenomenon that is at the very least unusual in modern political history, a phenomenon that might well have—as I shall soon attempt to show—far-reaching consequences.

X

Undeniably, the most important political event in Czechoslovakia after the advent of the Husák leadership in 1969 was the appearance of Charter 77. The spiritual and intellectual climate surrounding its appearance, however, was not the product of any immediate political event. That climate was created by the trial of some young musicians associated with a rock group called "The Plastic People of the Universe." Their trial was not a confrontation of two differing political forces or conceptions, but two differing conceptions of life. On the one hand, there was the sterile puritanism of the post-totalitarian establishment and, on the other hand, unknown young people who wanted no more than to be able to live within the truth, to play the music they enjoyed, to sing songs that were relevant to their lives, and to live freely in dignity and partnership. These people had no past history of political activity. They were not highly motivated members of the opposition with political ambitions, nor were they former politicians expelled from the power structures. They had been given every

opportunity to adapt to the status quo, to accept the principles of living within a lie and thus to enjoy life undisturbed by the authorities. Yet they decided on a different course. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of it, their case had a very special impact on everyone who had not yet given up hope. Moreover, when the trial took place, a new mood had begun to surface after the years of waiting, of apathy, and of skepticism toward various forms of resistance. People were "tired of being tired"; they were fed up with the stagnation, the inactivity, barely hanging on in the hope that things might improve after all. In some ways the trial was the final straw. Many groups of differing tendencies which until then had remained isolated from each other, reluctant to cooperate, or which were committed to forms of action that made cooperation difficult, were suddenly struck with the powerful realization that freedom is indivisible. Everyone understood that an attack on the Czech musical underground was an attack on a most elementary and important thing, something that in fact bound everyone together: it was an attack on the very notion of living within the truth, on the real aims of life. The freedom to play rock music was understood as a human freedom and thus as essentially the same as the freedom to engage in philosophical and political reflection, the freedom to write, the freedom to express and defend the various social and political interests of society. People were inspired to feel a genuine sense of solidarity with the young musicians and they came to realize that not standing up for the freedom of others, regardless of how remote their means of creativity or their attitude to life, meant surrendering one's own freedom. (There is no freedom without equality before the law, and there is no equality before the law without freedom; Charter 77 has given this ancient notion a new and characteristic dimension, which has immensely important implications for modern Czech history. What Sladeček,* the author of the book *Sixty-eight,* in a brilliant analysis, calls the "principle of exclusion," lies at the root of all our present-day moral and political misery. This principle was born at the end of the Second World War in that strange collusion of democrats and Communists and was subsequently developed further

* Sladeček is a pseudonym for the Petr Pithart, who was active in reform circles during the Prague Spring and a signatory of Charter 77. His book *Sixty-eight* is a study of the Prague Spring. After the fall of Communism, Pithart served as Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and as a member of the Senate.

and further, right to the bitter end. For the first time in decades this principle has been overcome, by Charter 77: all those united in the Charter have, for the first time, become equal partners. Charter 77 is not merely a coalition of Communists and non-Communists—that would be nothing historically new and, from the moral and political point of view, nothing revolutionary—but it is a community that is a priori open to anyone, and no one in it is a priori assigned an inferior position.) This was the climate, then, in which Charter 77 was created. Who could have foreseen that the prosecution of one or two obscure rock groups would have such far-reaching consequences?

I think that the origins of Charter 77 illustrate very well what I have already suggested above: that in the post-totalitarian system, the real background to the movements that gradually assume political significance does not usually consist of overtly political events or confrontations between different forces or concepts that are openly political. These movements for the most part originate elsewhere, in the far broader area of the "prepolitical," where living within a lie confronts living within the truth, that is, where the demands of the post-totalitarian system conflict with the real aims of life. These real aims can naturally assume a great many forms. Sometimes they appear as the basic material or social interests of a group or an individual; at other times, they may appear as certain intellectual and spiritual interests; at still other times, they may be the most fundamental of existential demands, such as the simple longing of people to live their own lives in dignity. Such a conflict acquires a political character, then, not because of the elementary political nature of the aims demanding to be heard but simply because, given the complex system of manipulation on which the post-totalitarian system is founded and on which it is also dependent, every free human act or expression, every attempt to live within the truth, must necessarily appear as a threat to the system and, thus, as something which is political par excellence. Any eventual political articulation of the movements that grow out of this "prepolitical" hinterland is secondary. It develops and matures as a result of a subsequent confrontation with the system, and not because it started off as a political program, project, or impulse.

Once again, the events of 1968 confirm this. The Communist politicians who were trying to reform the system came forward with their program not because they had suddenly experienced a mystical enlight-

enment, but because they were led to do so by continued and increasing pressure from areas of life that had nothing to do with politics in the traditional sense of the word. In fact, they were trying in political ways to solve the social conflicts (which in fact were confrontations between the aims of the system and the aims of life) that almost every level of society had been experiencing daily, and had been thinking about with increasing openness for years. Backed by this living resonance throughout society, scholars and artists had defined the problem in a wide variety of ways and students were demanding solutions.

The genesis of Charter 77 also illustrates the special political significance of the moral aspect of things that I have mentioned. Charter 77 would have been unimaginable without that powerful sense of solidarity among widely differing groups, and without the sudden realization that it was impossible to go on waiting any longer, and that the truth had to be spoken loudly and collectively, regardless of the virtual certainty of sanctions and the uncertainty of any tangible results in the immediate future. "There are some things worth suffering for," Jan Patočka wrote shortly before his death. I think that Chartists understand this not only as Patočka's legacy, but also as the best explanation of why they do what they do.

Seen from the outside, and chiefly from the vantage point of the system and its power structure, Charter 77 came as a surprise, as a bolt out of the blue. It was not a bolt out of the blue, of course, but that impression is understandable, since the ferment that led to it took place in the "hidden sphere," in that semidarkness where things are difficult to chart or analyze. The chances of predicting the appearance of the Charter were just as slight as the chances are now of predicting where it will lead. Once again, it was that shock, so typical of moments when something from the hidden sphere suddenly bursts through the moribund surface of living within a lie. The more one is trapped in the world of appearances, the more surprising it is when something like that happens.

XI

In societies under the post-totalitarian system, all political life in the traditional sense has been eliminated. People have no opportunity to express

themselves politically in public, let alone to organize politically. The gap that results is filled by ideological ritual. In such a situation, people's interest in political matters naturally dwindles and independent political thought, insofar as it exists at all, is seen by the majority as unrealistic, farfetched, a kind of self-indulgent game, hopelessly distant from their everyday concerns; something admirable, perhaps, but quite pointless, because it is on the one hand entirely utopian and on the other hand extraordinarily dangerous, in view of the unusual vigor with which any move in that direction is persecuted by the regime.

Yet even in such societies, individuals and groups of people exist who do not abandon politics as a vocation and who, in one way or another, strive to think independently, to express themselves and in some cases even to organize politically, because that is a part of their attempt to live within the truth.

The fact that these people exist and work is in itself immensely important and worthwhile. Even in the worst of times, they maintain the continuity of political thought. If some genuine political impulse emerges from this or that "prepolitical" confrontation and is properly articulated early enough, thus increasing its chances of relative success, then this is frequently due to these isolated generals without an army who, because they have maintained the continuity of political thought in the face of enormous difficulties, can at the right moment enrich the new impulse with the fruits of their own political thinking. Once again, there is ample evidence for this process in Czechoslovakia. Almost all those who were political prisoners in the early 1970s, who had apparently been made to suffer in vain because of their quixotic efforts to work politically among an utterly apathetic and demoralized society, belong today—inevitably—among the most active Chartists. In Charter 77, the moral legacy of their earlier sacrifices is valued, and they have enriched this movement with their experience and that element of political thinking.

And yet it seems to me that the thought and activity of those friends who have never given up direct political work and who are always ready to assume direct political responsibility very often suffer from one chronic fault; an insufficient understanding of the historical uniqueness of the post-totalitarian system as a social and political reality. They have little understanding of the specific nature of power that is typical for this system and therefore they overestimate the importance of direct political work in

the traditional sense. Moreover, they fail to appreciate the political significance of those "prepolitical" events and processes that provide the living humus from which genuine political change usually springs. As political actors—or, rather, as people with political ambitions—they frequently try to pick up where natural political life left off. They maintain models of behavior that may have been appropriate in more normal political circumstances and thus, without really being aware of it, they bring an outmoded way of thinking, old habits, conceptions, categories, and notions to bear on circumstances that are quite new and radically different, without first giving adequate thought to the meaning and substance of such things in the new circumstances, to what politics as such means now, to what sort of thing can have political impact and potential, and in what way. Because such people have been excluded from the structures of power and are no longer able to influence those structures directly (and because they remain faithful to traditional notions of politics established in more or less democratic societies or in classical dictatorships) they frequently, in a sense, lose touch with reality. Why make compromises with reality, they say, when none of our proposals will ever be accepted anyway? Thus they find themselves in a world of genuinely utopian thinking.

As I have already tried to indicate, however, genuinely far-reaching political events do not emerge from the same sources and in the same way in the post-totalitarian system as they do in a democracy. And if a large portion of the public is indifferent to, even skeptical of, alternative political models and programs and the private establishment of opposition political parties, this is not merely because there is a general feeling of apathy toward public affairs and a loss of that sense of higher responsibility; in other words, it is not just a consequence of the general demoralization. There is also a bit of healthy social instinct at work in this attitude. It is as if people sensed intuitively that "nothing is what it seems any longer," as the saying goes, and that from now on, therefore, things must be done entirely differently as well.

If some of the most important political impulses in Soviet bloc countries in recent years have come initially—that is, before being felt on the level of actual power—from mathematicians, philosophers, physicians, writers, historians, ordinary workers, and so on, more frequently than from politicians, and if the driving force behind the various dissident movements comes from so many people in nonpolitical professions, this is not because

these people are more clever than those who see themselves primarily as politicians. It is because those who are not politicians are also not so bound by traditional political thinking and political habits and therefore, paradoxically, they are more aware of genuine political reality and more sensitive to what can and should be done under the circumstances.

There is no way around it: no matter how beautiful an alternative political model can be, it can no longer speak to the "hidden sphere," inspire people and society, call for real political ferment. The real sphere of potential politics in the post-totalitarian system is elsewhere: in the continuing and cruel tension between the complex demands of that system and the aims of life, that is, the elementary need of human beings to live, to a certain extent at least, in harmony with themselves, that is, to live in a bearable way, not to be humiliated by their superiors and officials, not to be continually watched by the police, to be able to express themselves freely, to find an outlet for their creativity, to enjoy legal security, and so on. Anything that touches this field concretely, anything that relates to this fundamental, omnipresent, and living tension, will inevitably speak to people. Abstract projects for an ideal political or economic order do not interest them to anything like the same extent—and rightly so—not only because everyone knows how little chance they have of succeeding, but also because today people feel that the less political policies are derived from a concrete and human here and now and the more they fix their sights on an abstract "someday," the more easily they can degenerate into new forms of human enslavement. People who live in the post-totalitarian system know only too well that the question of whether one or several political parties are in power, and how these parties define and label themselves, is of far less importance than the question of whether or not it is possible to live like a human being.

To shed the burden of traditional political categories and habits and open oneself up fully to the world of human existence and then to draw political conclusions only after having analyzed it: this is not only politically more realistic but at the same time, from the point of view of an "ideal state of affairs," politically more promising as well. A genuine, profound, and lasting change for the better—as I shall attempt to show—can no longer result from the victory (were such a victory possible) of any particular traditional political conception, which can ultimately be only external, that is, a structural or systemic conception. More than ever

before, such a change will have to derive from human existence, from the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe. If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society. This is not something that can be designed and introduced like a new car. If it is to be more than just a new variation of the old degeneration, it must above all be an expression of life in the process of transforming itself. A better system will not automatically ensure a better life. In fact, the opposite is true: only by creating a better life can a better system be developed.

Once more I repeat that I am not underestimating the importance of political thought and conceptual political work. On the contrary, I think that genuine political thought and genuinely political work is precisely what we continually fail to achieve. If I say "genuine," however, I have in mind the kind of thought and conceptual work that has freed itself of all the traditional political schemata that have been imported into our circumstances from a world that will never return (and whose return, even were it possible, would provide no permanent solution to the most important problems).

The Second and Fourth Internationals, like many other political powers and organizations, may naturally provide significant political support for various efforts of ours, but neither of them can solve our problems for us. They operate in a different world and are a product of different circumstances. Their theoretical concepts can be interesting and instructive to us, but one thing is certain: we cannot solve our problems simply by identifying with these organizations. And the attempt in our country to place what we do in the context of some of the discussions that dominate political life in democratic societies often seems like sheer folly. For example, is it possible to talk seriously about whether we want to change the system or merely reform it? In the circumstances under which we live, this is a pseudoproblem, since for the time being there is simply no way we can accomplish either goal. We are not even clear about where reform ends and change begins. We know from a number of harsh experiences that neither reform nor change is in itself a guarantee of anything. We know that ultimately it is all the same to us whether or not the system in which we live, in the light of a particular doctrine, appears changed or reformed. Our concern is whether we can live with dignity in such

a system, whether it serves people rather than people serving it. We are struggling to achieve this with the means available to us, and the means it makes sense to employ. Western journalists, submerged in the political banalities in which they live, may label our approach as overly legalistic, as too risky, revisionist, counterrevolutionary, bourgeois, Communist, or as too right-wing or left-wing. But this is the very last thing that interests us.

XII

One concept that is a constant source of confusion chiefly because it has been imported into our circumstances from circumstances that are entirely different is the concept of an opposition. What exactly is an opposition in the post-totalitarian system?

In democratic societies with a traditional parliamentary system of government, political opposition is understood as a political force on the level of actual power (most frequently a party or coalition of parties) which is not a part of the government. It offers an alternative political program, it has ambitions to govern, and it is recognized and respected by the government in power as a natural element in the political life of the country. It seeks to spread its influence by political means, and competes for power on the basis of agreed-upon legal regulations.

In addition to this form of opposition, there exists the phenomenon of the "extra-parliamentary opposition," which again consists of forces organized more or less on the level of actual power, but which operate outside the rules created by the system, and which employ different means than are usual within that framework.

In classical dictatorships, the term "opposition" is understood to mean the political forces which have also come out with an alternative political program. They operate either legally or on the outer limits of legality, but in any case they cannot compete for power within the limits of some agreed-upon regulations. Or the term "opposition" may be applied to forces preparing for a violent confrontation with the ruling power, or who feel themselves to be in this state of confrontation already, such as various guerrilla groups or liberation movements.

An opposition in the post-totalitarian system does not exist in any of these senses. In what way, then, can the term be used?

1. Occasionally the term "opposition" is applied, mainly by Western journalists, to persons or groups inside the power structure who find themselves in a state of hidden conflict with the highest authorities. The reasons for this conflict may be certain differences (not every sharp differences naturally) of a conceptual nature, but more frequently it is quite simply a longing for power or a personal antipathy to others who represent that power.

2. Opposition here can also be understood as everything that does or can have an indirect political effect in the sense already mentioned, that is, everything the post-totalitarian system feels threatened by, which in fact means everything it is threatened by. In this sense, the opposition is every attempt to live within the truth, from the greengrocer's refusal to put the slogan in his window to a freely written poem; in other words, everything in which the genuine aims of life go beyond the limits placed on them by the aims of the system.

3. More frequently, however, the opposition is usually understood (again, largely by Western journalists) as groups of people who make public their nonconformist stances and critical opinions, who make no secret of their independent thinking and who, to a greater or lesser degree, consider themselves a political force. In this sense, the notion of an opposition more or less overlaps with the notion of dissent, although, of course, there are great differences in the degree to which that label is accepted or rejected. It depends not only on the extent to which these people understand their power as a directly political force, and on whether they have ambitions to participate in actual power, but also on how each of them understands the notion of an opposition.

Again, here is an example: in its original declaration, Charter 77 emphasized that it was not an opposition because it had no intention of presenting an alternative political program. It sees its mission as something quite different, for it has not presented such programs. In fact, if the presenting of an alternative program defines the nature of an opposition in post-totalitarian states, then the Charter cannot be considered an opposition.

The Czechoslovakian government, however, has considered Charter 77 as an expressly oppositional association from the very beginning, and has treated it accordingly. This means that the government—and this is only natural—understands the term "opposition" more or less as I defined it in point 2, that is, as everything that manages to avoid total manipula-

tion and which therefore denies the principle that the system has an absolute claim on the individual.

If we accept this definition of opposition, then of course we must, along with the government, consider the Charter a genuine opposition, because it represents a serious challenge to the integrity of post-totalitarian power, founded as it is on the universality of living with a lie.

It is a different matter, however, when we look at the extent to which individual signatories of Charter 77 think of themselves as an opposition. My impression is that most base their understanding of the term "opposition" on the traditional meaning of the word as it became established in democratic societies (or in classical dictatorships); therefore, they understand opposition, even in Czechoslovakia, as a politically defined force which, although it does not operate on the level of actual power, and even less within the framework of certain rules respected by the government, would still not reject the opportunity to participate in actual power because it has, in a sense, an alternative political program whose proponents are prepared to accept direct political responsibility for it. Given this notion of an opposition, some Chartists—the great majority—do not see themselves in this way. Others—a minority—do, even though they fully respect the fact that there is no room within Charter 77 for "oppositional" activity in this sense. At the same time, however, perhaps every Chartist is familiar enough with the specific nature of conditions in the post-totalitarian system to realize that it is not only the struggle for human rights that has its own peculiar political power, but incomparably more "innocent" activities as well, and therefore they can be understood as an aspect of opposition. No Chartist can really object to being considered an opposition in this sense.

There is another circumstance, however, that considerably complicates matters. For many decades, the power ruling society in the Soviet bloc has used the label "opposition" as the blackest of indictments, as synonymous with the word "enemy." To brand someone "a member of the opposition" is tantamount to saying he is trying to overthrow the government and put an end to socialism (naturally in the pay of the imperialists). There have been times when this label led straight to the gallows, and of course this does not encourage people to apply the same label to themselves. Moreover, it is only a word, and what is actually done is more important than how it is labeled.

The final reason why many reject such a term is because there is something negative about the notion of an "opposition." People who so define themselves do so in relation to a prior "position." In other words, they relate themselves specifically to the power that rules society and through it, define themselves, deriving their own position from the position of the regime. For people who have simply decided to live within the truth, to say aloud what they think, to express their solidarity with their fellow citizens, to create as they want and simply to live in harmony with their better self, it is naturally disagreeable to feel required to define their own original and positive position negatively, in terms of something else, and to think of themselves primarily as people who are against something, not simply as people who *are* what they are.

Obviously, the only way to avoid misunderstanding is to say clearly—before one starts using them—in what sense the terms "opposition" and "member of the opposition" are being used and how they are in fact to be understood in our circumstances.

33

Moral Destruction (1998)

ALAIN BESANÇON

The physical destruction—the vast loss of life and demolition of the earth that constitute the most obvious aspect of the century's ideological disasters—tends to be the focus of the studies and statistics. But surrounding this is an invisible sphere where the damage is probably more extensive, affects more people, and will take even longer to repair: the destruction of minds and souls.

INEPTITUDE

The intellectual genealogy of the two main ideologies that engulfed part of humanity in the twentieth century can be traced—and this has been done. The danger is that one might come to believe that the vast, deep-seated ideas upon which these ideologies drew live on in those ideologies. But this would grant them a dignity and nobility they do not deserve, would play their game—for this is the genealogy to which they lay claim. Marxism-Leninism proclaimed itself heir to a tradition stretching back to Heraclitus and Democritus.* It claimed to descend from Lucretius,† the Enlightenment, Hegel, and the entire scientific movement. It claimed

* Heraclitus and Democritus were pre-Socratic philosophers.

† Titus Lucretius Carus (first century B.C.) was a Roman poet and philosopher and author of *On the Nature of Things*.

to be a synthesis and a fulfillment of these movements. Nazism found its predecessors in Greek tragedy, Herder,* Novalis,† a different reading of Hegel, and Nietzsche; and naturally, it based its legitimacy on the scientific movement since Darwin. Yet these claims must not be believed. They constitute an illusion entailing the further danger of compromising the lineage to which they lay claim: there is a risk of criticizing Hegel—or any other philosopher or scholar—for having begotten such descendants.

This illusion wears off when we observe how the Nazi and Communist leaders truly operated intellectually. Their thinking was completely governed by an extraordinarily impoverished system of interpreting the world. It saw classes or races as engaged in a dualistic struggle. The definition of these classes or races makes sense only within the system, with the result that any objectivity that could exist in the notion of classes or races vanishes. These notions gone awry explain the nature of the struggle; they justify it and, in the mind of the ideologist, guide the actions of enemies and allies. The means used to reach the goal can be cunning and shrewd (and in fact, with Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh, Communism benefited from agents more capable than Hitler). But the logic of the system as a whole remains absurd, and its goal unattainable.

The psychological state of the militant is distinguished by his fanatical investment in the system. This central vision reorganizes his entire intellectual and perceptual field, all the way to the periphery. Language is transformed: it is no longer used to communicate or express, but to conceal a contrived continuity between the system and reality. Ideological language is charged with the magical role of forcing reality to conform to a particular vision of the world. It is a liturgical language for which every utterance points to its speaker's adherence to the system, and it summons the interlocutor to adhere as well. Code words thus constitute threats and figures of power.

It is not possible to remain intelligent under the spell of ideology. Nazism seduced some great minds (Heidegger, Carl Schmitt‡), but these

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* Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) was a German poet and philosopher closely associated with Romanticism.

† Novalis, a pseudonym for Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772–1801), a German philosopher also associated with Romanticism.

‡ Carl Schmitt. See note on page 226.

projected onto Nazism foreign ideas of their own: a profound antimodernism and antidemocratism, and nationalism transformed into metaphysics. Nazism seemed to take on all these elements—but not the reflection, depth, and metaphysics that made them of value to the intellectual lives of these philosophers. They, too, had succumbed to the illusion of genealogy.

Marxism-Leninism recruited only second-rate minds (Georg Lukács, for example): men who lost their talent rather quickly. Communist parties could boast a number of illustrious members: Louis Aragon,* Brecht,† Picasso, Paul Langevin,‡ Pablo Neruda.§ The party made a point of keeping these members on the sidelines in order to confine their adherence to chance, mood, interest, or circumstance. But despite the superficial nature of these artists' adherence, the painting of Picasso (see *The Massacres of Korea*) and the poetry of Neruda and Aragon suffered because of it. Artistically, adherence could survive in a style of provocation. The embrace of ideology by superior minds came about through a random confluence of diverse nonideological passions. But as these passions came closer to the heart of the ideology, they faded. Sometimes, a residue of ineptitude was all that remained.

In the Communist zone, leaders sometimes took it upon themselves to collect and publish the basic tenets of their ideology under their own names. Such was the case with Stalin and Mao. These basic outlines amount to a few pages containing the entire doctrine: no treatise was deemed superior to these manuals, which were sometimes described as "elementary" to make people believe that more scholarly ones also existed. Although these longer works were no more than expanded and diluted versions of the same, this did not prevent them from being imposed as objects of "study"—which means that their subjects were required to spend hundreds of hours reviewing and mindlessly repeating their les-

* Louis Aragon (1897–1982), the French poet and novelist and member of the French Communist Party.

† Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was a German playwright and poet who was a committed Marxist, though he never joined a Communist Party.

‡ Paul Langevin (1872–1946) was a renowned French physicist and member of the French Communist Party.

§ Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was a Chilean poet and member of the Chilean Communist Party.

sons. In the Nazi zone, such compendia did not exist. All thinking was supposed to hinge on that of the leader, who presented himself as oracular and inspired. In analyzing the substance of Nazism, one finds a miserable blend of social Darwinism, eugenics, a vaguely Nietzschean hatred for Christianity, a religion of "resentment," and pathological anti-Semitism.

The Nazi or Communist presents a clinical case for psychiatric examination. He seems imprisoned, cut off from reality, capable of arguing indefinitely in circles with his interlocutor, obsessed. Yet he is convinced he is rational. This is why psychiatrists have established a link between this state of chronic systematized delirium and such conditions as schizophrenia and paranoia. If one ventures further into the examination, it becomes clear that this characterization is metaphorical. The most obvious sign that ideological insanity is artificial is that it is reversible: when the pressure ceases and circumstances change, one gets out all at once, as if from a dream. But it is a waking dream—one that does not block motility and maintains a certain apparently rational coherence. Outside the affected area, which is the superior part of the mind in a healthy person—the part that articulates religion, philosophy, and the "governing ideas of reason," as Kant would say—the comprehensive functions seem intact but focused on and enslaved by the surreal object. When one wakes, one's mind is empty; one's life and knowledge must be entirely relearned. Germany, which for a century had been the Athens of Europe, woke up stupefied by twelve years of Nazism. And how to describe Russia, which was subjugated to this pedagogy of the absurd far more systematically for seventy years, and where intellectual foundations were less established and more fragile?

These artificial mental illnesses were also epidemic and contagious. They have been compared to a sudden outbreak of the plague or the flu. Formally, the Nazification of Germany in 1933 and the Chinese Cultural Revolution indeed developed like a contagious disease. But such comparisons probably have only metaphorical value while we await a better understanding of these psychological pandemics.

The backdrop of moral destruction is ineptitude. It is its condition. Natural and shared awareness can be distorted only if one's conception of the world, one's link to reality, has first been disrupted. Whether this blindness is an extenuating circumstance or an integral part of the evil, I will not debate here. In any case, it does not suspend moral judgment.

The Nazi Falsification of the Good

When we attempt to examine closely all that was done to people at the six camps listed in the first chapter, words do not suffice, concepts fail, imagination refuses to conceive, and memory refuses to retain. We are outside of the human realm here, as though standing before a negative transcendence. The idea of the demonic arises irresistibly.

What suggests the demonic is that these acts were carried out in the name of a good, under the guise of a moral code. The instrument of moral destruction is a falsification of the good that allows the criminal—to an extent impossible to describe—to sweep aside any sense that he is doing evil.

During the war, Heinrich Himmler* delivered several speeches to high-ranking officers and section leaders of the SS.[1] His tone was always one of moral exhortation.

The following passage rises above the contingent circumstances of the era, above even the immediate interests of the Reich, to touch the universal:

> All that we do must be justified in relation to our ancestors. If we do not find this moral connection, which is the deepest and best connection because it is the most natural, we will never rise to the level necessary to defeat Christianity and to constitute this German Reich, which will be a blessing to the entire world. For thousands of years, it has been the duty of the blond race to rule the world and always to bring it happiness and civilization. (June 9, 1942).

The good, according to Nazism, consisted in restoring a natural order that history had corrupted. The proper hierarchical organization of races had been overturned by the harmful influences of Christianity ("this plague, the worst sickness that has affected us throughout our history"), democracy, the rule of gold, Bolshevism, and the Jews. The German Reich was the apex of the natural order, but it made room for the other Germanic peoples—the Scandinavians, the Dutch, and the Flemish. Even

* Himmler. See note on page 22.

the British empire, "a worldwide empire created by the white race," could be left intact. The French and Italians were next in the hierarchy. Further down were the Slavs, who would be enslaved and reduced in number: Himmler contemplated a "reduction" of thirty million. The natural order, according to which the best, the most hardened, the purest, and the most chivalrous rule, would also be restored within the German society. The living examples of men of this nature were the elite of the Waffen-SS. By the time Himmler made this speech, the incurable and disabled—those alienated from the German "race"—had already been secretly euthanized in hospitals and asylums.

All of this would not take place, Himmler continued, without an extremely hard fight. In his speeches, he constantly invoked heroism, going beyond oneself, and a sense of the higher duty his listeners owed towards the Reich, especially when it concerned carrying out difficult orders. "We must tackle our ideological duties and answer to destiny, no matter what the situation is; we must always stand tall and never fall or falter, but be ever present until our life comes to an end or our task is accomplished."

From a certain standpoint, then, the "Final Solution" was only a technical problem, like delousing when there is a danger of typhus: "Destroying lice is not a question of world view. It is a question of cleanliness. . . . Soon there will be no more lice" (April 24, 1934). The metaphor of the insect that must be destroyed turns up regularly in the discourse of ideological extermination. Lenin had already used it. But Himmler, good leader that he was, said this to reassure and encourage his audience. He knew that it was not easy, that false scruples could arise. But to accomplish a certain type of task, "it is always necessary to be aware of the fact that we are caught up in a primitive, natural, original, and racial battle" (December 1, 1943). These four adjectives appropriately describe the Nazi ethic.

In an October 6, 1943, address, Himmler stated his view of the Final Solution:

> The phrase "the Jews must be exterminated" consists of few words; it is quickly said, gentlemen. But what it requires for those who carry it out is the hardest and most difficult thing in the world. Naturally, these are Jews, just Jews, of course; but think of all those—even friends of the Party—who have made the famous request to some department or to myself saying, "Of course, all

> Jews are swine, except Mr. So-and-so, who is a decent Jew and should not be harmed." I dare say that judging by the number of these requests and the number of these opinions in Germany, there were more decent Jews than existed nominally. . . . I insist that you simply listen to what I am saying here in this meeting and never speak of it. We were asked the following question: what are we to do with the women and children? I have come to a decision and have found an obvious solution for this matter also. I did not feel I had the right to exterminate the men—in other words, to kill them or have them killed—while allowing their children to grow up, children who would take revenge on our children and our descendants. It was necessary to make the serious decision to eliminate this people from the earth. For the organization that had to accomplish this task, it was the hardest thing it had done. I think I can say that this was accomplished without our men or our officers suffering because of it in their hearts or in their souls. Even so, this was a real danger. The path lies between the two possibilities: become too hardened, become heartless, and no longer respect human life; or else become too soft and lose one's mind to the point of having fits of hysterics—this path between Scylla and Charybdis is hopelessly narrow.

This virtuous golden mean that Himmler called for was occasionally attained: several great executioners were indeed loving fathers and sensitive husbands. The "task" had to be performed without the intervention of "selfish" motives—calmly, without nervous weakness. Indulging in drinking, raping a young girl, robbing the prisoners for one's profit, or stooping to pointless sadism showed a lack of discipline, disorder. Such actions marked a forgetting of Nazi idealism; they were blameworthy and had to be punished.

Nazi morality demanded that one follow the order that nature had established. But this natural order was not a matter of contemplation; it was deduced from ideology. With the pole of good represented by the "blond race" and that of evil by the "Jewish race," the cosmic battle was to end with the victory of one or the other.

But the whole thing was false. There are no "races" in the sense intended by the Nazis. The tall blond Aryan did not exist, even if there

were Germans who were tall and blond. The Jew as represented by Nazism did not exist, because the racial representation that Nazism made of the Jews had only coincidental connections with the real identity of the people of the biblical covenant. The Nazi thought he saw nature, but nature was dissimulated by his interpretive grid. Nor did he perceive the historical and military situation without distortion. Because of his "Nazism," Hitler went to war, and because of his same Nazism, he lost that war. The superiority of Stalin was that he was able to set his ideology aside long enough to prepare for victory. The Leninist ideology was "better" because it allowed for such pauses and authorized a political patience of which Nazism—impulsive and convulsive—was incapable.

The Nazi ethic manifested itself as a negation of the ethical tradition of all humanity. Only a few marginal thinkers had dared to advance some of its themes, but only as an aesthetic provocation. In fact, the kind of naturalism that it proposed—the superman, the subhuman, the will to power, nihilism, irrationalism—places it more in the domain of aesthetics. It is the artistic kitsch that intoxicates, the staging of Nuremberg, the colossal architecture à la Speer,* the dark splendor of brute force. As a morality, the Nazi ethic cannot gain serious support in history. Its perversity easily becomes evident and it cannot be universalized.

The Communist ethic, by contrast, can be universalized and its perversity is not readily evident. This explains why Nazi morality was less contagious than Communist morality and why the moral destruction it engendered was more limited in scope. The "inferior" "subhuman" races saw an imminent deadly threat in this doctrine and could not be tempted. As for the German people themselves, to the extent that they followed Hitler, they did so out of nationalism rather than Nazism. Nationalism, a natural passion that has been particularly aroused during the last two centuries, supplied the Nazi regime's artificial constructs with energy and fuel, just as it supplied these for the Communist regime. Although some members of the German elite had supported the chancellor's coming to power, the vulgar elitism of Hitler's troops had nothing to do with the old elite. Those who claimed to follow Nietzsche were caught in the trap like everyone else. As for the loyalty of the officer corps, it can be explained by

* Albert Speer was Hitler's chief architect and served as Minister of Armaments and War Production during WWII.

military tradition, reinforced on occasion by a little Kantianism or Hegelianism. The soldiers obeyed simply as soldiers do.

That is why the theoretical crux of Nazism—the physical destruction of the Jewish people, then of other peoples in hierarchical order—was one of the best-kept secrets of the Reich. *Kristallnacht** was a test, an attempt to invite and rally the German people behind the great plan, but it was not a political success. Thus, Hitler decided to build the six major extermination camps outside the historical borders of Germany.

The moral damage of Nazism can be described in terms of concentric circles moving around the central core suggested by the passage quoted from Himmler. The central core consists of those who were converted to the fullness of Nazism. Few in number, these were the heart of the party, the heart of the Waffen-SS and the Gestapo. The practitioners of extermination were even fewer. They did not have to be numerous: the high level of German industrial and technological development made it possible to economize on manpower. The few hundred SS who controlled the death camps delegated the "manual" tasks to the victims themselves. The *Einsatzgruppen*† were recruited without preliminary qualifications. It has been noted that, theoretically, members were allowed to leave these corps of murderers. But major troubles awaited them, the first of which was fighting on the Soviet front. The men of the *Einsatzgruppen* were—or became—monsters. Whether they were all converted to the Nazi ideology is still an open question. But in every population, it is easy to recruit as many torturers and murderers as are needed. The ideological veneer only made it easier for some to accept such a vocation; it allowed this vocation to flourish.

It has been noted that the Wehrmacht could not have been ignorant of the activity of the *Einsatzgruppen* that operated behind its lines. The destination of the convoys and liquidation of the ghettos did not leave much room for doubt; despite the no-man's-land surrounding the death camps,

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* *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass, refers to a series of attacks on Jews in Germany and Austria on November 9–10, 1938.

† *Einsatzgruppen* were the paramilitary death squads who followed the advance of the Wehrmacht and were responsible for mass killings such as Babi Yar. They operated primarily in the territory seized after the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 and continued their operations after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941.

something eventually had to leak out. Hilberg writes that the secret was "a secret that everyone knew." That is probably true, but two points must be considered.

First, a secret that everyone knows is not the same thing as a proclaimed policy or a public fact. The Germans followed out of military and civic discipline, nationalism, fear, and the inability to devise or carry out an act of resistance. The secret—despite being out—released them from immediate moral responsibility, or at least allowed them to hedge, to look the other way, and to act as though it all did not exist. Under Nazism, German society still had remnants of law. The officer corps included a number of men who remained loyal to the canons of war and strove—with greater or lesser success—to maintain a certain honor. Because private property had not yet been abolished, civil society thrived. The film *Schindler's List* is built around the fact that a business owner was still able to recruit and house a Jewish workforce in Germany. From the first year of Communism, such a thing was no longer conceivable in Russia.

Second, the contents of the secret were not believable for a normal mind. Much of Germany still lived in a natural society governed by a natural morality, and did not size up what was in store for it. This fact made it harder to believe that reality was being hidden from it, that the suspicions were well founded and the various clues obvious. Even Jews—who underwent expropriation, concentration, and deportation—did not always believe it when they arrived at the gas chambers.

Nazi pedagogy was practiced for only a few years. When Germany was occupied, Nazism disappeared immediately—at least in the Western Zone (in the East, it was put in part to new use). It disappeared, first, because it was tried and sentenced at all levels under German and international law. Another reason was that the majority of the population had not been deeply saturated with it. Finally, Nazism disappeared because even the Nazis, once awakened, did not clearly see the link between what they had been under the ideology's magic spell and what they were now that this spell had worn off. Eichmann's fundamental nature was that of a middle-class bureaucrat; he had been this before and would have become again had he not been captured and punished. He greeted this punishment passively, in keeping with his bland character. As Hannah Arendt rightly pointed out, the crimes Eichmann was accused of were incommensurable with the limited consciousness of this banal being.

The Communist Falsification of the Good

Communism was moral. A moral imperative underlay the entire prehistory of Bolshevism (French and German socialism, Russian populism), and the victory of Bolshevism was celebrated as a victory of the good. Aesthetics did not take precedence over ethics. The Nazi considered himself an artist; the Communist, a virtuous man.

The foundation of Communism's morality lay in its interpretive system, one deduced from knowledge. Primitive nature, the system taught, was not the hierarchical, cruel, implacable nature in which the superior Nazi man rejoices, but resembled the goodness of nature according to Rousseau. Nature had been lost, but socialism would re-create it by lifting it to a higher level. There, man would be completely fulfilled. Trotsky claimed that such exemplars as Michelangelo and da Vinci would mark the base level of the new humanity. Communism democratized the superman.

Natural progress was regarded as historical progress, since historical and dialectical materialism unifies nature and history. Communism appropriated progress, that great theme of the Enlightenment, in contrast with the theme of decadence that haunted Nazism; but in this case, dramatic progress included tremendous and unavoidable destruction. One recognizes here bits of Hegelian pantragism[2] and particularly the hard-core Darwinism of the struggle to survive applied to society. The "social relations of production" ("slavery," "feudalism," "capitalism") succeeded one another like the various reigns in the animal kingdom, as when the mammals took over from the reptiles. Such progressivism was a secret point of agreement between Nazism and Communism: you don't cry over spilled milk; you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs; when you chop wood, the chips fly—all these expressions were familiar to Stalin. On both sides, history was the master. Nazism would restore the world in its beauty; Communism, in its goodness.

The Communist restoration depended on the human will enlightened by ideology. Even more clearly than Nazism, Leninism followed the gnostic blueprint of two antagonistic principles and three periods. In the beginning, there was the primitive commune; in the future, there would be Communism; today, there was the period of the battle between the two principles. The forces that furthered "progress" were deemed good

and those that hindered it were bad. The scientifically guaranteed ideology designated the bad principle. Not a biological entity in the sense of an inferior race, that principle was a social entity seen to grow like a cancer throughout society: it was property, capitalism, and the complex of mores, law, and culture summed up in the expression "the spirit of capitalism." Those who had understood the three periods and two principles, who were acquainted with the essence of the naturo-historical order, who knew both the direction of its evolution and the means to hasten it—these people came together and formed the party.

All means that would bring about the end as foreseen by the revolutionary were considered good. Since the process was as natural as it was historical, destruction of the old order would in itself bring about the new order. Bakunin's expression, summarizing what he had understood from Hegel, was the maxim of Bolshevism: the spirit of destruction is the same as the spirit of creation. In Bolshevism's prehistory, the *Narodnik** heroes were conscious of the moral revolution that followed from these ideas. Chernyshevsky,† Nechayev,‡ and Tkachyov§ developed a literature of "the new man," one Dostoyevsky satirized and whose metaphysical meaning he grasped. The new man appropriated the new morality of an absolute devotion to the ends. This new morality required one to drive out the remnants of the old morality, which "class enemies" advanced in order to perpetuate their rule. Lenin canonized Communist ethics. Trotsky wrote a pamphlet whose title says it all: *Their Morality and Ours*.

THEIR MORALITY AND OURS

What is amazing is that not everyone outside of this revolutionary milieu was aware of this moral rupture. In fact, Communism used words from

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* *Narodnik*, a member of the nineteenth-century socialist movement in Russia.

† Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828–1889) was a radical Russian journalist whose novel *What is to be Done?* (1863) was very influential with figures such as Lenin.

‡ Sergey Nechayev (1847–1882) was a Russian revolutionary perhaps best known for his advocacy of a professional, militant, revolutionary party.

§ Peter Tkachyov (1844–1886) was another Russian radical and Marxist who favored the seizure of state power by an elite party.

the old morality—justice, equality, liberty, etc.—to describe the new one. It is true that the world Communism planned to destroy was full of injustice and oppression. Virtuous men had to acknowledge that the Communists denounced these evils with extreme vigor. Everyone agreed that distributive justice was not upheld. The good man, guided by a sense of justice, attempted to promote a better distribution of wealth. The Communist, by contrast, saw the idea of justice consisting not in a "fair" distribution of wealth, but in the establishment of socialism and suppression of private property—this consequently voided all standards of fairness, fairness itself, and ultimately the right of individuals. The Communist commitment to creating an awareness of inequality did not aim to call attention to a defect of law, but to elicit desire for a society in which regulation would not be a matter of law. Similarly, the Communist idea of liberty aimed to arouse the awareness of oppression in circumstances in which the individual—a victim of capitalist alienation—believed he was free. Finally, all the words that were used to express modalities of the good—justice, liberty, humanity, goodness, generosity, achievement—were directed towards a single goal that encompassed and fulfilled them all: Communism. In the Communist perspective, these words were no more than homonyms of the old words.

Yet some simple criteria should have cleared up this confusion. By natural or common morality I mean the morality referred to by the sages not only of antiquity, but also of China, India, and Africa. In the world of the Bible, this morality is summed up in the second table of the commandments of Moses. Communist ethics opposed common morality head-on, and very consciously. The Communist ethic sought to destroy ownership—and the laws and liberty connected to it—and to reform the order of the family. By permitting itself all manner of lies and violence in order to overcome the old order and call forth the new, it openly and fundamentally infringed upon the fifth commandment ("Honor thy father and thy mother"), the sixth ("Thou shalt not kill"), the seventh ("Thou shalt not commit adultery"), the eighth ("Thou shalt not steal"), the ninth ("Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor"), and the tenth ("Thou shalt not covet that which is thy neighbor's"). It is not at all necessary to believe in biblical revelation to accept the spirit of these precepts, which are found throughout the earth. The majority of mankind honors the idea that certain behaviors are true and good because they correspond to what

we know of the structure of the universe. Communism, which conceived of another universe, derived its morality from that. This is why Communism challenged not only the precepts, but also their foundation: the natural world. Although I said previously that Communist morality was based on nature and history, this in fact was not true: it was based on a super-nature that never existed and on a history devoid of truth.

In *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, Raymond Aron argues that

> the Soviet regime came from a revolutionary will inspired by a humanitarian ideal. The goal was to create the most humane regime history had ever known, the first regime in which everyone could achieve humanity, where classes would disappear, and where the homogeneity of society would allow for the mutual recognition of citizens. But this movement aiming at an absolute goal did not shrink from any means: according to the doctrine, only violence could create this absolutely good society, and the proletariat was involved in a ruthless war with capitalism. From this combination of a sublime goal and ruthless methods, the different phases of the Soviet regime arose.[3]

These lines reflect, with all possible clarity, the ambiguity and illusion of Communism. What it labeled the human and the humanitarian was really the superhuman and superhumanitarian promised by the ideology. The human and the humanitarian had neither rights nor a future. Classes were not reconciled; they were to disappear. Society did not become homogeneous; its autonomy and its proper dynamic were destroyed. The war against capitalism was waged not by the proletariat, but by the ideological sect that spoke and acted in its name. Finally, capitalism existed solely in opposition to a socialism that existed nowhere but in the ideology; consequently, the concept of capitalism was inadequate to describing the reality that had to be brought down. The goal was not sublime: it took on the colors of sublimity. The means, which was killing, became the only possible end.

After drawing a long and admirable parallel between Nazism and Communism, Raymond Aron writes:

> I will maintain to the end that the difference between these two phenomena is an essential one, whatever the similarities may be.

> The difference is essential because of the idea that drives each of the two enterprises. In one case, the final outcome is the labor camp; in the other, it is the gas chamber. In the one case, there is at work a will to build a new regime—and perhaps a new man—using any means; in the other, what is at work is a properly demonic will to destroy a pseudo-race.[4]

I, too, acknowledge the difference, but on the basis of arguments I will expound below. I am not convinced by those Aron presents here. Nazism also planned for a new regime and a new man using any means. It is impossible to decide which is more demonic: destroying a pseudorace and then successively destroying the other pseudoraces—including the "superior" one—because they are all polluted, or destroying a pseudoclass and then successively destroying the others, which are all contaminated by the spirit of capitalism.

Raymond Aron concludes:

> If I had to summarize the meaning of each of the two enterprises, I think these are the phrases I would suggest: concerning the Soviet enterprise, I would quote the trite expression "he who wants to play the angel plays the beast." Concerning the Hitlerian enterprise, I would say: "it would be wrong for man to set a goal to become like a beast of prey: he pulls it off too well."

Is it better to be a beast that plays the angel or a man that plays the beast—given that both are beasts "of prey"? This is indeterminable. In the first case, the degree of the lie is stronger and the appeal is greater. The Communist falsification of the good went deeper, since the crime more closely resembled the good than the naked crime of the Nazi. This trait allowed Communism to expand more widely and to work on hearts that would have turned away from an SS calling. Making good men bad is perhaps more demonic than making men who are already bad worse. Raymond Aron's argument boils down to a difference of intentions: the Nazi intention contradicted the universal idea of the good, whereas the Communist intention perverted it, because it had the appearance of good. But it tricked many more inattentive souls to go along with it as a result. Because the Communist project was unattainable, we are left to judge

only the means; but because these means were incapable of attaining their end, they became the real end. The lie overlaid the crime, making it all the more tempting and dangerous.

Leninist Communism is more tempting because it appropriates an ancient ideal—albeit by removing it from its heritage. At the time they became adherents, many were unable to discern the corruption brought about by Leninism. Some people remained Communists for a long time, even all their lives, without realizing it. The confusion of the old (common) morality with the new morality was never completely dispelled. Thus, a number of "decent people," those whose moral decay was delayed, remained in Communist parties. Their presence counts in favor of granting collective amnesty. The former Communist has been more easily forgiven than the former Nazi, who was suspected of having consciously broken with common morality from the time of his joining.

Communism is more dangerous because its education is insidious and gradual; it disguises the evil acts it causes as good acts. It is also more dangerous because it is unpredictable to its future victims: anyone can potentially assume enemy status from one moment to the next. Nazism designated its enemies in advance. True, it endowed them with a fantastical nature bearing no relation to reality. But behind the subhuman, there was a real Jew, behind the despicable Slav, a Pole or a Ukrainian in flesh and blood. Those who were neither Jewish nor Slavic got a reprieve. The same universalism that had represented the great superiority of Communism over Nazi exclusiveness before the Communists' seizure of power became a universal threat once the Communists were in power. Capitalism, as the word was employed, existed only ideologically. No category of humanity was spared the curse it bore: whether the "middle" and "poor" peasantry, the intelligentsia, the "proletariat," or the party itself. Because anyone could be contaminated by the spirit of capitalism, no one was safe from suspicion.

With a certain realism, Nazi leaders promised blood and tears and anticipated a fight to the death to restore humanity to its proper racial order. Lenin, on the contrary, thought that the time was right and the eschatology would be realized as soon as "capitalism" was overthrown. The revolution was going to sweep over the entire world. Once the expropriators were expropriated, socialist administration would spontaneously move into position. But nothing happened on the day following Novem-

ber 7, 1917: the curtain rose on an empty stage. Where did the proletariat, the poor and middle peasantry, and proletarian internationalism all go? Lenin was alone with his party (and a few Red Guards) in a hostile or indifferent world.

Still, because Marxism-Leninism was "scientific," experience had to validate the theory. With capitalism overthrown, socialism had to take over. But since this did not seem to be happening, socialism had to be constructed along the lines indicated by the theory and each step had to be verified to ensure that the result would be true to the prediction. Piece by piece, a universe of lies was constructed to replace the truth. An atmosphere of widespread lies thickened as the facts increasingly diverged from the words that were supposed to describe them. The good asserted itself frenetically in order to deny the reality of evil.

This, mainly, is how moral destruction occurs in the Communist regime. As in the Nazi regime, it expands in concentric circles around an initial core.

At the center lies the party, and in the party, its ruling circle. When the party first comes to power, it is still completely in the grip of ideology. This is the time when it makes every effort to eliminate "the class enemy." Its moral conscience completely poisoned, the party destroys entire categories of human beings in the name of its utopia. A retrospective view shows that, in the cases of Russia, Korea, China, Romania, Poland, and Cambodia, the initial slaughters were some of the most significant in the history of these regimes—their toll was something on the order of 10 percent or more of the population.

When it turns out that the utopian dream is still not being realized, that the propitiatory decimation has been useless, there is a gradual shift from seeking a utopia to merely preserving power. Given that the objective enemy has already been exterminated, vigilance is now required. It must not be allowed to regroup, let alone to rise up in the very ranks of the party. A second terror arises, a time that seems absurd because it corresponds to no social and political resistance, but aims at a total control of all human beings and all thought. Fear then becomes universal: it spreads within the party itself, and every member feels threatened by it. Everyone denounces everyone else, and all are caught in a chain reaction of betrayal.

Next comes the third stage. Taking precautions against a permanent purge, the party now contents itself with a routine management of power

and security. It no longer believes in the ideology, but continues to speak its language. The party sees that this language, which it knows to be a lie, is the only one spoken because it is the mark of the party's domination. The party accumulates privileges and advantages; it becomes a caste. Corruption within the party becomes widespread. The people compare its members no longer to wolves, but to swine.

The periphery is composed of the rest of the population, which is immediately summoned and mobilized for the building of socialism. The entire periphery is threatened, fed lies, and solicited to participate in the crime.

The first step of the mobilization process is to seal off the periphery. As one of its first acts, every Communist government closes its borders. Until 1939, the Nazis authorized departures in exchange for ransom—this served the "purity" of Germany. But the Communists never did this: they needed their borders completely sealed off to protect the secret of their slaughter, of their failure. But they especially needed such isolation because the country was supposed to become an extensive school where all would receive the education that would eradicate the spirit of capitalism and instill the socialist spirit in its place.

The second step is to control information. The population must not know what goes on beyond the socialist camp. It must not know what goes on inside either. Indeed, it must not know its past or its present—only its radiant future.

The third step is to replace reality with a pseudoreality. To this end, a whole corps specializes in the production of false journalists, false historians, a false literature, and a false art that pretends to reflect a fictitious reality as in a photograph. A false economy produces imaginary statistics. Sometimes, the need for cosmetic retouches led to Nazi-style measures. In the USSR, for example, disabled ex-servicemen and workers were removed from the public eye and taken to remote asylums where they could no longer spoil the picture. It has been reported that, in Korea, a decision has been made that the dwarf "race" must disappear; thus, dwarves are deported and prevented from procreating. Millions are involved in the construction of this immense stage production. What is its purpose? To prove that socialism is not only possible, but under construction, that it is growing stronger—or, better, that it has already been realized. There is a new, free, self-regulating society where "new human beings" think and act

spontaneously within this fictitious reality. The strongest tool fabricated by this power is a new language in which existing words take on a meaning that differs from the common usage. The diction and special vocabulary of this new language endow it with the quality of a liturgical language; it denotes the transcendence of socialism and indicates the omnipotence of the party. Its popular use is the obvious sign of the people's servitude.

At first, a significant portion of the population welcomes the teaching of the lie in good faith. It enters into the new morality, taking along its old moral heritage. These people love the leaders who promise them happiness and they believe that they are happy. They think that they are living in a just order. Hating the enemies of socialism, they denounce them and approve of having them robbed and killed. They join in their extermination and lend their strength to the endeavor. Inadvertently, they take part in the crime. Along the way, ignorance, misinformation, and faulty reasoning numb their faculties and they lose their intellectual and moral bearings. When their sense of justice is offended, their inability to distinguish Communism from the common moral ideal causes them to attribute the offense to the external enemy. Until the collapse of Communism, people who were mistreated by the police or by militants in Russia commonly called them "Fascists." It did not occur to them to call them by their true name: Communists.

But life on this socialist stage—instead of becoming "more cheerful and happier," as Stalin said in the middle of the Great Purge—became grimmer, more dismal. Fear was everywhere and people had to fight to survive. The moral degradation that had been subconscious to that point now crept into consciousness. The socialist people, who had committed evil believing they were doing good, now knew what they were doing. They denounced, stole, and degraded themselves; they became evil and cowardly and they were ashamed. The Communist regime did not hide its crimes as Nazism did; it proclaimed them and invited the population to join in. Each condemnation was followed by a meeting at which the accused was publicly cursed by his friends, his wife, his children. These yielded to the ceremony out of fear or out of self-interest. The enthusiastic Stakhanovite of an earlier era—if he had ever existed as anything but a prop—revealed himself to be a lazy, servile, idiotic *Homo Sovieticus*. The women came to loathe the men and the children their parents—even though they sensed that they, in turn, were becoming like them.

The last stage is described for us by the writers of the end of Sovietism: Erofeev* and Zinoviev.† The most widespread feelings were despair and self-disgust. What remained was to take advantage of the specific pleasures this regime procured: irresponsibility, idleness, and vegetative passivity. One no longer made the effort to practice double-thought; one attempted simply to stop thinking entirely. One withdrew. As with the drunkard, tearful sentimentality and self-pity were a way to call others to witness one's degradation. In Zinoviev's "ratorium" one was still involved in the Hobbesian struggle of all against all, but with very little energy. Zinoviev considered *Homo Sovieticus* to be the product of an irreversible mutation of the species—fortunately, he was probably wrong.

There was no safe haven where one could escape the teaching of the lie. The social structures of the old society had been destroyed along with private property, and had been replaced by new ones that were at once schools and places of surveillance: the *kolkhoz*, the Chinese popular commune for the peasant, the "trade union" for the worker, the "unions" for writers and artists. The history of these regimes can be described as a continuous race for universal control. From the standpoint of the subjects, it was a frantic race for places of refuge, or at the very least, for places to hide. And there were always places of refuge. In Russia, a few families of the old intelligentsia were able to preserve their traditions—an Andrei Sakharov‡ emerged from this class. In the universities, there were more or less untroubled chairs of Assyriology or Greek philology, and in the subservient churches there were pockets of fresh air. At the end of the regime, small groups of young people could be found in Moscow. Having recovered their moral and intellectual lives, these people chose to live by their wits, not taking on any work or seeking any position, and minimized their contact with the external Soviet world. In this way, they were able to hold on until the very end.

In the Soviet empire, the Communist zeal to reeducate stopped at the gate of the camp. For the Nazis, there was no need to convert subhu-

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* Venedikt Erofeev was a Russian writer best known for his prose poem *Moscow Stations* (1969).

† Alexander Zinoviev was a Russian writer best known for his mocking, satirical works, *The Yawning Heights* (1976) and *Homo Sovieticus* (1982).

‡ Sakharov. See note on page 354.

mans, and the Bolsheviks practically abandoned the idea of converting prisoners. Solzhenitsyn could therefore state that the camp, in spite of its horrors, was a place of intellectual freedom and fresh spiritual air. Asian Communism, on the contrary, made the camp the place where teaching was practiced in the most obsessive and cruel way. Authorities noted the progress of the prisoners. No one but the dead or the reeducated ever left.

Assessment

Within the limits imposed by the historical perspective adopted here, let us attempt a comparative assessment of the moral destruction wrought by Nazism and Communism in the twentieth century.

By moral destruction, I do not mean the breakdown of mores in the sense of the age-old grumbling of the elderly as they examine the mores of the youth. Nor do I wish to pass judgment on this century compared to others. There is no philosophical reason to think that man was either more or less virtuous during this period. Still, Communism and Nazism set out to change something more fundamental than mores—that is, the very rule of morality, of our sense of good and evil. And in this, they committed acts unknown in prior human experience.

Even though the Nazis carried crime to a level of intensity perhaps unequaled by Communism, one must nevertheless affirm that Communism brought about a more widespread and deeper moral destruction. There are two reasons for this.

First, the obligation to internalize the new moral code extended to the entire population subjected to reeducation. Accounts tell us that this compulsory internalization was the most unbearable part of Communist oppression: all the rest—the absence of political and civil liberties, police surveillance, physical repression, and fear itself—was nothing compared to this mutilating pedagogy. Having driven its victims mad because it contradicted what was obvious to the senses and understanding, it did so all the more because the whole range of "measures" and "organs" were ultimately subjected to this indoctrination. Communism, unlike Nazism, had the time to pursue its pedagogy, and it did so to the full extent. Its collapse or retreat has left behind a disfigured humanity. The poisoning of souls is more difficult to purge from the former Communist bloc than it

was from Germany. The latter nation, stricken with a temporary insanity, awoke from its nightmare ready for work, self-examination, and a purifying repentance.

Next, the moral destruction of Communism was worse because the confusion between common morality and Communist morality remains deep rooted. With the latter hiding behind the former, it is parasitical and polluting, using common morality to spread its contagion. Here is a recent example: in the discussions that followed the publication of *The Black Book of Communism*, an editorial writer at the French Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* announced on television that 85 million deaths did not in any way tarnish the Communist ideal. They represented only a very unfortunate deviation. After Auschwitz, he continued, one can no longer be a Nazi, but one can remain a Communist after the Soviet camps. This man, who spoke in good conscience, did not realize at all that he had just articulated his own most fatal condemnation. He could not see that the Communist idea had so perverted the principles of reality and morality that it could indeed outlive 85 million corpses, whereas the Nazi idea had succumbed under its dead. He thought he had spoken as a great and decent man, idealistic and uncompromising, without realizing that he had uttered a monstrosity. Communism is more perverse than Nazism because it does not ask man consciously to take the moral step of the criminal, and because it uses the spirit of justice and goodness that abounds throughout the earth to spread evil over all the earth. Each Communist experience begins anew in innocence.

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The Return of Political Philosophy (2000)

PIERRE MANENT

It could be said that the twentieth century has witnessed the disappearance, or withering away, of political philosophy. An old-fashioned empirical proof of this statement is easy to produce: certainly no Hegel, no Marx, even no Comte, has lived in our century, able to convey to the few and the many alike a powerful vision of our social and political statics and dynamics.

However highly we might think of the philosophical capacities and results of Heidegger, Bergson,* Whitehead,† or Wittgenstein,‡ we would not single out any of them for his contribution to *political* philosophy. Heidegger, it is true, ventured into some political action, including speeches, but it is a matter for deep regret. Heidegger's was the steepest fall; on a much lower level, there was Sartre's indefatigable vituperation against anything rational or decent in civic life.

It is true that contrariwise, authors like Sir Karl Popper§ and Ray-

* Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941) was a French philosopher whose best known work is *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932).

† Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) was an English philosopher and mathematician—very influential in analytic philosophy.

‡ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was an Austrian-born philosopher whose work focuses on logic and language.

§ Sir Karl Popper (1902–1994) was an Austrian-born philosopher of science who also wrote extensively on political themes. He taught for many years in London and his most

mond Aron have been worthy contributors to both general epistemology and political inquiry, always in a spirit of sturdy and humane citizenship. And some modern representatives of that venerable tradition of thought, Thomism, have offered serious reflection on moral, social, and political problems within a comprehensive account of the world. But despite such countervailing considerations, the general diagnosis seems to me to be inescapable: no modern original philosopher has been willing or able to include a thorough analysis of political life within his account of the human world, or, conversely, to elaborate his account of the whole from an analysis of our political circumstances.

To be sure, the effort to understand social and political life did not cease in this century. It even underwent a huge expansion through the extraordinary development of the social sciences, which have increasingly determined the self-understanding of modern men and women. It might be asserted that the collective and multifaceted work of all those sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists has shed more light on our common life than could the exertions of any individual mind, however gifted; that, when it comes to understanding our social and political life, this "collective thought" is necessarily more impartial than even a mind as impartial as Hegel's; that in this sense political philosophy, including democratic political philosophy, has an undemocratic character since it cannot be so collectivized; and that accordingly its withering away is a natural accompaniment to the consolidation and extension of democracy.

As is the case with all collective enterprises, the social sciences have many more practitioners than they do ideas and principles. I would even argue that they rest upon one sole principle, the separation of facts and values, which sets them apart from philosophy and testifies to their scientific character. The demise of political philosophy is of a piece with the triumph of this principle. I admit that generally such sweeping statements are better avoided. Nevertheless it is a fact that the fact/value distinction has become not only the presupposition of present-day social science but also the prevalent opinion in society at large. In present conditions, a teenager proves his or her coming of age, a citizen proves his or her competence and loyalty, by making use of this principle. Nowhere has the prin-

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prominent political work is the two-volume *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945).

ciple been set forth with more power and brilliance than in the work of Max Weber. The limitless and tormented landscape of twentieth-century social and political thought is commanded by Weber's towering presence and overwhelming influence.

Speaking before students just after the end of World War I, Weber asks about his duty as a teacher, about what his audience, and the public at large, can legitimately require of him. He answers, in reflections later published as *Science as a Vocation*, that they have a claim on his *intellectual probity*: the teacher, as a scientist, has the obligation to acknowledge that to establish the intrinsic structures of cultural values and to evaluate those values constitute two totally distinct tasks. Weber rigorously distinguishes between *science*, which ascertains facts and relations between facts, and *life*, which necessarily involves evaluation and action.

This proposition has become commonplace today, yet it is difficult to understand what exactly it means. To give an example that is more than an example, how does one describe what goes on in a concentration camp without evaluating it? As some commentators have pointed out, Weber, in his historical and sociological studies, does not tire of evaluating even when establishing the facts; no, he ceaselessly evaluates so as to be able to establish the facts. Otherwise how could he tell a "prophet" from a "charlatan"?

However that may be, it is clear that for Weber, intellectual honesty necessarily prevents us from believing or teaching that science can show us how we ought to live; and that this same intellectual probity necessarily prevents us from believing, for instance, that a thing is good because it is beautiful, or the other way around. But what are the causes of his peculiar preoccupation with intellectual probity? In Weber's opinion, modern science exposes it to a specific danger.

Modern science exhibits a singular trait: it is necessarily unfinished—it can never be completed. It is open-ended, since there is always more to be known. Weber asks why human beings devote themselves to an activity that can never be completed, why they ceaselessly try to know what they know they will never completely know. The meaning of modern science is to be meaningless. Thus intellectual honesty requires that we not confer an arbitrary meaning on science, that we be faithful to its meaninglessness by fearlessly carrying on its enterprise. This necessary virtue is at the same time inhuman, or superhuman; indeed it is heroic. Since heroism, how-

ever necessary, is rare, many so-called scholars or teachers succumb to the temptation to confer arbitrarily some human meaning on science, or its provisional results. Weber believed that the scientist who thus lapses from his duty transforms himself into a petty demagogue or a petty prophet.

What characterizes the modern situation is that only science can be the object of public affirmation or approbation. Other "values"—for instance, esthetic or religious "values"—cannot be publicly expressed with enough sincerity to hold their own in the public square. At the end of *Science as a Vocation*, we read:

> The fate of an epoch characterized by rationalization, intellectualization, most of all by the disenchantment of the world, led human beings to expel the most sublime and supreme values from public life. They found refuge either in the transcendent realm of mystical life or in the fraternity of direct and reciprocal relationships among isolated individuals. There is nothing fortuitous in the fact that the most eminent art of our time is intimate, not monumental, nor in the fact that nowadays it is only in small communities, in face-to-face contacts, in pianissimo, that we are able to recover something that might resemble the prophetic pneuma that formerly set whole communities ablaze and welded them together. . . . For those who are unable to bear this present fate with manliness, there is only this piece of advice: go back silently—without giving to your gesture the publicity dear to renegades, but simply and without ceremony—to the old churches who keep their arms widely open.

This eloquent conclusion bears, and needs, rereading today. There is nothing antiquated or quaint about it. On the contrary, the stripping down of the public square and the flight into private realms have continued apace, coupled with the ever growing power of science to mold every aspect of our lives, including the most intimate. As a consequence, public life is more and more exclusively filled with private lives: what remains of "the public" is nothing but the publicization of "the private"—or so it seems.

Of course, this assessment could be said to miss the fundamental fact of modern society which, under the appearance of meaninglessness, is the coming-into-being of the noblest principles of all, democracy and

self-determination. There is no doubt that Weber, however friendly to its political institutions, underestimates the strength and resilience of democracy, perhaps its human meaning and range. In his eyes democracy is no match—no remedy—for the disenchantment of the world, and for a good reason: it results from it. It is unable to reunify modern human beings since it ratifies and, so to speak, institutionalizes their intimate divisions.

If we take seriously *Science as a Vocation*, we will say that there is a gaping hole, a void, a meaninglessness at the heart of modern life since science, the highest and sole truly public activity, is meaningless. At the same time, if modern man wants to be equal to the task of science, he ought to look this nothingness in the face without blinking. In this sense, nihilism, at least this nihilism, is not only our curse but also our duty. Weber's eloquence aimed at keeping us awake and forcing our gaze toward this central nothingness. Thus the most authoritative, nay, the only authoritative voice in the realm of social and political thought in this century was a desperate voice.

It is impossible to put Max Weber behind us. Because he looms so large, it is difficult for us to see how the human phenomenon appeared before he separated science and life. But let us be alert enough to realize how strange and lopsided our intellectual and moral life currently is. Each and every human thing is fair game for science. Through separating facts from values we are able to divert the mighty flow of reality into the bottles of science.

But there is no reciprocity: science is never allowed to come back to illuminate reality and life. Democracy is predicated on the basic intelligence of the common man, which in turn is predicated on the inherent intelligibility of life, at least of the current occurrences of life. As a result, democracy is the regime that has the least tolerance for nihilism. (And nihilism breeds contempt for democracy.) To say that life is intelligible is not to say that it is unproblematic or without mystery. It is only to say that what we do is naturally accompanied by what we think and say, or that we ordinarily give some account of what we do. Our actions are many, and our accounts often conflicting, and so we reflect and deliberate and debate. The life of the mind is inherently dialectical—although, through the separation of facts and values, we have often lost sight of that reality.

Weber well understood that the separation between life and science was in some sense unbearable for ordinary mankind, and he rightly

noticed that the attendant discomfort gave rise to fake monumentalism, spurious prophesying, and pedantic fanaticism. Certainly Europe would soon experience all those ugly phenomena on a scale that the desperate Weber had not anticipated even in his most desperate mood. Very roughly, we could say that totalitarianism was the attempt to fuse together science and life. In Communism, the fusion was forced through the despotism of "science"—understood vulgarly. In Nazism, the fusion came through the despotism of "life"—again, understood in an utterly vulgar way.

Totalitarianism was the *experiment crucis* for political philosophy in our century. Through it political philosophy was radically tested, and was found wanting. The mere fact that such terrible enterprises could arise was proof that European thinkers had not developed and spread a rational and humane understanding of modern political circumstances. This claim does not presuppose the proposition, abstract to the point of meaninglessness, that "ideas govern the world"—only the sound observation that human beings are thinking animals who need tolerably accurate ideas and evaluations to orient themselves in the world. This truism is the truer the more intellectually active and able the person concerned. It would be unfair to extend culpability for this century's crimes into the past indefinitely, but it is true that, after Hegel elaborated his synthesis, no other philosopher was able to give a satisfactory, that is, an impartial, account of the modern state and society. Political philosophy after Hegel was not able to give a nearly satisfactory account of totalitarianism during and even *after* the fact.

Michael Oakeshott* once remarked that great political philosophies are generally answers to specific political predicaments. It is easy to document this proposition from Plato and Aristotle, through Machiavelli and Hobbes, to Rousseau and Hegel. As I observed at the outset, the twentieth century did not elicit such comprehensive answers from political reflection, and this despite the fact that its predicament was of the most extreme sort: devastating world wars, murderous revolutions, beastly tyrannies. If there ever was a time for writing a new *Leviathan*, that was it.

But our most impressive documents are novels: which political treatise on Communism is a match for *1984* or *Animal Farm* or *One Day in the Life*

* Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) was an English philosopher who is regarded as one of the seminal conservative thinkers of the latter half of the twentieth century.

of Ivan Denisovich or *The Yawning Heights*?* And what a strange commentary on this situation that, for some readers at least, the most suggestive introduction to Nazi tyranny to be found in *On the Marmor Cliffs* (1939), a fable whose author, Ernst Jünger, was a soldier and adventurer with more than a passing complicity with the nihilistic mood that fomented Hitler's rise to power. Some will object that this indictment is unfair, that many penetrating books on Communism, Fascism, and Nazism have been written by historians, social scientists, and political philosophers; indeed, that the notion of totalitarianism itself got its currency and credit more from philosophy than from literature; and that at least one philosophical book on the subject—Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)—won a fame and exercised a power of fascination comparable to those of the literary works I have just mentioned. The objection is valid as far as it goes. We need to take stock of this momentous debate.

For political philosophers, dealing with Nazism and Communism was difficult. These unprecedented *political* phenomena required a specific effort of analysis, yet most of the interpreters no longer had much place in their thought for political categories, especially the notion of *regime*. Their natural reaction was to make sense of these new forms of politics by subsuming them under nonpolitical categories with which they were more familiar. For instance, Communism came to be understood as the domination of "bureaucracy," or as "bureaucratic state capitalism," a Trotskyist mantra widely used in France and elsewhere. As for Nazism, not a few on the left would see in it the instrument of "the most reactionary strata of financial capital," while many on the right saw just another avatar of "eternal Germany."

Of course these definitions, however fashionable for a time, could not long satisfy honest or discerning people, who eventually elaborated and gave credit to the notion of totalitarianism as a new and specific regime. We can be grateful to those who introduced this notion, because more than any other it helped us to look at the facts, to "save the phenomena," so to speak, and accordingly to evaluate more adequately the thorough ugliness of the whole thing. At the same time, however, totalitarianism remained an ad hoc construct. The discussion of it mainly concerned the marks, or criteria, of totalitarianism: whether "ideology" or "terror" or

* *The Yawning Heights*. See note on page 572.

both together were principal or necessary components of any "totalitarian" regime. The proponents of the notion were prone to try to outbid one another by concentrating attention on the most extreme characteristics of these regimes, with the result that, as in Hannah Arendt's case, the notion is not even applicable to Nazism and Communism except in their most extreme fits of terror and murder. This bidding war induced the mainstream of political scientists to renounce the notion completely, or to dilute it until it became unrecognizable and useless.

The facts of Nazism and Communism obliged honest and discerning observers to elaborate the notion of a new regime. At the same time, this "regime" was the opposite of a regime. The classical regime, harking back to Plato's and Aristotle's first elaboration of political philosophy, is what gives political life its relative stability and intelligibility. The totalitarian "regime," on the contrary, was characterized first of all by its instability and its formlessness. It described itself, accurately, as essentially a *movement*: the "international Communist movement," or *die NZ-Bewegung* (Munich was called by the Nazis *die Hauptstadt der Bewegung* [the capital of the movement]). Arendt herself was acutely aware of the paradoxical character of totalitarianism. In a piece titled "Ideology and Terror,"* Arendt borrows from Montesquieu's analysis and classification of regimes to try to categorize the totalitarian regime. For Montesquieu, each regime has a nature and a principle. The principle is the more important, since it is the "spring" that "moves" the regime. Now, explains Arendt, totalitarianism has no principle, not even fear—which is the principle of "despotism" according to Montesquieu. For fear to be a principal motive of action, the individual would need to think or feel that he is able to escape danger through his own actions; under totalitarianism, on the other hand, where the killings wax and wane without any discernible reason, this sense cannot be sustained. Raymond Aron's commentary on Arendt's analysis is severe but illuminating:

> One cannot help asking oneself whether Mrs. Arendt's thesis, thus formulated, is not contradictory. A regime without a principle is not a regime. . . . As a regime, it exists solely in its author's imagination. In other words, when Mrs. Arendt elaborates some aspects

* See part 2, chapter 2 of this volume.

> of Hitlerite and Stalinist phenomena into a regime, a political essence, she brings out and probably exaggerates the originality of German or Russian totalitarianism. Mistaking this admittedly real originality for a fundamentally new regime, she is induced to read into our epoch the negation of classical philosophies and thus to slide into a contradiction: defining a working regime by an essence which so to speak implies the impossibility of its working.

This sharp criticism undoubtedly hits the mark. But Arendt would probably hit back that the "contradiction" is not of her making: it belongs to the "contradictory essence" of totalitarianism.

It is interesting to note that Alain Besançon, a distinguished French historian who studied with Aron, rediscovered and trenchantly brought out this difficulty twenty years later. In an article aptly titled "On the Difficulty of Defining the Soviet Regime,"* Besançon tries and exhausts Aristotle's and Montesquieu's classifications of regimes, concluding that the Soviet regime does not fit into any of them. In his eyes it is an "absolutely new" regime, and its newness lies in the part played by "ideology." Besançon proposes that instead of "totalitarianism" we simply classify Communism as an "ideological regime." In their different ways, Arendt, Aron, and Besançon all draw our attention to the problem of relating totalitarianism to the tradition of political philosophy. The totalitarian regime seems to be the regime embodying the negation of the idea of regime, and accordingly the irrelevance of classical political philosophy.

More than any other thinker in this century, Leo Strauss tried to recover the genuine meaning of political philosophy. Indeed, political philosophy as originally understood owes its bare survival—fittingly unobtrusive to the point of secretiveness—to Leo Strauss's sole and unaided efforts. Without him, the philosophy of history, or historicism of any stripe, would have swallowed political philosophy completely. For Strauss, in seeming contradiction to what I have just said, twentieth-century experiences were motives for going back to political philosophy, specifically to *classical* political philosophy: "When we were brought face to face with tyranny—with a kind of tyranny that surpassed the boldest imagination of the most powerful thinkers of the past—our political science failed to

* See part 1, chapter 4 of this volume.

recognize it. It is not surprising then that many of our contemporaries . . . were relieved when they rediscovered the pages in which Plato and other classical thinkers seemed to have interpreted for us the horrors of the twentieth century." Thus modern tyranny—Strauss carefully avoids the word "totalitarianism"—brings us back to ancient tyranny as described and understood by Plato and other Greek thinkers.

At the same time, Strauss makes clear that there is in modern tyranny something specific, and terrible, that eludes the grasp of classical categories. The return to the Greeks can only be a "first step toward an exact analysis of present-day tyranny," he argued, for contemporary tyranny is "fundamentally different" from the tyranny analyzed by the ancients. How could Strauss offer such a proposition? Recall that he devoted his life to establishing that classical philosophy elaborated the true understanding of the world, founded on nature which does not change, and that accordingly it does not need to be superseded or improved upon by a new "historical" understanding. Given that, how could Leo Strauss admit that Communism and Fascism are *fundamentally* new? How could the political life of man undergo a fundamental change? He answers: "Present-day tyranny, in contradistinction to classical tyranny, is based on the unlimited progress in the 'conquest of nature' which is made possible by modern science, as well as on the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge."

Strauss was perfectly aware that such a change, or at least the possibility of such a change, needs to have been taken into account by Greek philosophy if the claim he raises on its behalf is to be upheld. He affirms that that is the case: "Both possibilities—the possibility of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the possibility of the popularization of philosophy or science—were known to the classics. . . . But the classics rejected them as 'unnatural,' i.e., as destructive of humanity. They did not dream of present-day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imagination in entirely different directions." Thus, the Greek thinkers did not imagine modern tyranny because they understood its principles and saw that they would be so much against nature that there was no use dwelling on them.

However galling the affirmation that the Greeks understood us better than we understand them, and ourselves, it is not what most impresses us in Strauss' assessment. It is rather that the two principles that make for the specific evil of modern tyranny are part and parcel of the foundation

on which modern democracy was built. If this is true, modern tyranny would have as much in common with modern democracy as with ancient, i.e., "natural," tyranny.

We must not forget that these rare propositions of Strauss on contemporary political circumstances were formulated in the context of an exchange with Alexandre Kojève, one of the most influential interpreters of Hegel in this century. The Russian-born philosopher and French civil servant held that the conceptions of classical political philosophy have lost their relevance because the modern regime, or rather state, precisely through the transformation of nature and the reciprocal recognition implied in democratic citizenship, has basically solved the human problem. The unpalatable traits of modern "tyranny" must not blind us to the fact that "history has come to its end."

Thus Kojève is not much interested in the totalitarian phenomenon, the ugliness of which disappears against the big picture. However shocking Kojève's benign neglect, even favor, toward Communist totalitarianism, he does draw our attention to the disturbing fact that modern democracy shares with totalitarianism the claim to have solved the human problem. Modern democracy understands itself not as a regime among others, not even as the best regime, but as the only legitimate regime: it embodies the final, because rational, state of humanity.

Here we encounter a topic as difficult and intricate as it is important. In the classical understanding, the plurality of regimes was rooted in the intrinsic diversity of human nature, in the heterogeneity of its parts: human beings were soul and body, and the life of the human soul had its springs in the specific motions of its different parts. In the modern democratic understanding, a human being is first and foremost a self, and mankind as a whole is simply the fulfilled self writ large, which is to say, considered universally. This generalization is valid only if all the selves of all the human beings are in some important sense the same. The affirmation of the self, or the self-affirmation of humankind as composed of selves, thus presupposes the homogeneity of human nature. For the modern understanding, the solution of the human problem is one with the homogenization of human life.

A mighty task—an indefinite one—is contained herein, because that homogeneity can never be complete, or it will be so only "at the end of history," when nature, human as well as nonhuman, will have been mastered.

But in some sense, and this is Kojève's point, we have already reached a sufficient level of mastery. The science necessary for the conquest of nature is without end, it is true, but that means that its power is destined to grow without end, which means that reason allows us to imagine ourselves all-powerful already. As for human life proper, oppressive differences will long continue to arise, but they are in principle already vanquished by the declaration and institutionalization of the equality of rights. In brief, the miracles of science and the good works of democracy are attested enough to legitimate faith that liberal democracy has answered all the big questions of politics.

Of course faith can be lost. When the good works of democracy are less apparent, or when the delicate mechanisms of constitutional government, necessary for guaranteeing rights, are not available in a certain situation, the temptation arises to make good on the promises of democracy by every means available, that is, even or especially by antidemocratic means, to bring science to completion and achieve human homogeneity by overturning democracy.

Herein lies what has been aptly called the "totalitarian temptation." In this sense, as the French philosopher Claude LeFort has pointed out in *L'invention dinsocratique* (1981), his acute analysis of democracy, totalitarianism is the attempt to "embody" or "incorporate" democracy, to transform "indeterminate" democracy into a visible "body." Democracy is "indeterminate" because, in the democratic dispensation, the "seat of power" is "void"—occupied only provisionally by succeeding representatives. The king's presence was overwhelming; the democratic statesmen's is ordinarily underwhelming. As long as the citizens have not accustomed themselves to the worthy but modest function of choosing their representatives, the representatives will not be a match for the majesty of the people. Some demagogue will explain to the people that he will lead them to the empty place so that they themselves will occupy the seat of power: "Totalitarianism establishes a mechanism which . . . aims to weld anew power and society, to obliterate all the signs of social division, to banish the indetermination which haunts democratic experience. . . . From democracy and against it a body is thus made anew." When writing those lines, LeFort had principally in mind the Soviet regime, but it is clear that "race," no less than "class," can offer the basis for the building of this new homogeneous body.

Thus LeFort, drawing part of his inspiration from the phenomenological tradition, brings to our attention the bodily character of the political, or the political character of the body. This close relationship, although coming to the surface of speech in common expressions like "political body" or "body politic," has long been obscured in our democratic dispensation. Our forefathers, on the contrary, were well aware of it. Indeed how best to define the predemocratic order? If we look for one synthetic trait, then we will define it as an order founded on *filiation*. Everyone's place in society was in principle determined by his or her "birth." One's name and estate were determined through heritage. There were only families, poor or rich, common or noble, but each one governed by the head of family.

In contradistinction to ancient cities, in which heads of families were roughly equal politically and participated in the same "public space," in Western predemocratic societies there was no public space. Or rather, what was public was the family analogy, the logic of filiation and paternity, the fact that the same representation of the human ties or bonds circulated throughout the whole. Ultimately, what was public, that is, what was sacred, was the person of the king, that is, *the king's body*.

This familial order, based as it was on the fecundity of the body and on accidents of birth, strikes us today as bizarre and even disgusting. If we are sophisticated enough, we will say with cool competence: it was the value system of our forefathers, ours is different, and our grandchildren's will again be different from it and ours. I'm afraid I am not so sophisticated. This familial order was not just a value system or a cultural construct. It drew its strength, its durability, its quasi-universal validity (before democracy) from the general awareness that it was rooted not only in an undoubtedly natural fact, but in the fact that, so to speak, sums up "nature," that is, birth and filiation.

Even among scholars, it is a common mistake to confuse any political reference to "the body" with "organicism." It is then seen either as a mere figure of speech, or, more ominously, as a "holistic" representation fraught with oppressive potentialities. As a matter of fact, a "body" is very different from what is generally understood by "organism." In the latter, the part is strictly subordinated to the whole. In the former, the whole is present and active in each part. Thus the idea of the body is not at all a mechanical, or even a physical, idea. It is, on the contrary, a spiritual idea:

each part is at the same time itself and the whole. In this sense, every society, every polity, is a body.

These very sketchy observations help us to understand the meaning and strength of the order of the body, and by the same token to wonder at its swift and nearly complete demise. LeFort describes the nature, and appreciates the enormity, of the process as follows:

> The *ancien régime* was made up of innumerable little bodies that provided people with their bearings. And those little bodies disposed themselves within a huge imaginary body of which the King's body offers a replica and the token of its integrity. The democratic revolution, long underground, blows up when the King's body is destroyed, when the head of the body politic falls to the ground, when accordingly the corporeity of society dissolves. Then something happens which I would dare to call the disincorporation of individuals. Extraordinary phenomenon. . . .

Why was it such an "extraordinary phenomenon"? To put it in a nutshell: while previous societies organized themselves so as to bind their members together, while they extolled the ideas of concord and unity, our democratic society organizes itself so as to untie, even to separate, its members, and thus guarantee their independence and their rights. In this sense, our society proposes to fulfill itself as a dis-society. An extraordinary phenomenon indeed!

But will not a society thus dissociating be unable to carry on, to say nothing of prospering? That is the recurrent fear in modern society, voiced by conservatives and socialists alike, with even a few liberals joining in at times. But as a matter of fact, belying all the prophets of doom, democratic societies have maintained their cohesion, they have prospered; indeed, they offer today—the vast bulk of mankind agrees on this point—the only viable and desirable way of organizing a decent common life. So we must infer that their continuous decomposition has been accompanied by a continuous recomposition. What is the principle of this recomposition? To cut a very long story short: it is the principle of *representation*. As LeFort emphasizes, the order of representation has succeeded the order of incorporation. And the principle behind the principle of representation is the *will*—the will of people—a purely spiritual principle. The ultimate

mainspring of democratic society is the fecundity of human will, or rather the capacity of the will to produce desirable effects.

Let us retrace our journey so far. I have argued that totalitarianism has been the *experimentum crucis* for political philosophy in this century, and that political philosophy, thus tested, was found wanting. We are able now to give a more precise assessment. The perplexities that attend the inquiry into the nature of totalitarian regimes do not arise solely from the peculiarly enigmatic essence of those regimes. Or rather, their enigmatic essence derives from another enigma or uncertainty, one that also concerns democracy. The uncertainty is this: where, and what, is the people's will? How can a purely spiritual principle give form and life to a body politic? The "totalitarian temptation" is made possible by, and takes place in, the uncharted territory between the "body" of predemocratic society and the "soul" of democratic politics. There is much more here than a glib metaphor. Indeed, we are at the heart of our practical and theoretical difficulties: herein lies the task of political philosophy, if it cares to have one.

We need to return again and again to the contrast between predemocratic and democratic societies, and to the dialectics between the two. This insistence may seem odd to Americans, since the U.S. had no real experience of predemocratic society and does not seem to be worse off for it: as Tocqueville so memorably said, "Americans are born equal, instead of becoming so." But my proposal is for a philosophical inquiry, not a historical one.

We begin with a paradox. We instinctively think that predemocratic societies gave an advantage to the soul as opposed to the body, even as we instinctively suppose that democratic societies have rejected the excessive pretensions of the soul and have "liberated the body," or, in Saint-Simonian parlance, "rehabilitated the flesh." These impressions are not simply erroneous; there is much truth in them. But at the same time we could say that the opposite also is true. We have seen that predemocratic societies were "incorporated" societies, rooted in the fecundity of the body, culminating in the king's body. As for democratic societies, while they are not particularly religious, they are politically and morally spiritualist, even otherwordly. Electing a representative, unlike begetting an heir, is the work of the will—of the mind or the soul.

That spirituality holds true not only in political relations, but in social and moral life as well. Democratic societies typically insist that all our

bonds, including our bodily ones, have their origin in a purely spiritual decision, a decision reached in full spiritual sovereignty. We reject any suggestion that the body could create bonds by itself, that there could be ties rooted essentially in the "flesh." The "new family" results from the growing understanding of marriage and parenthood as "continuous choice." Even bodily intercourse is no longer supposed to create bonds by itself, to have meaning by itself: it does so only as far, and as long, as the will makes it so. Such meaning the will is free to confer and withdraw "at will." We increasingly behave, and we increasingly interpret our behavior, as if we were angels who happen to have bodies. Carnal *knowledge* is no longer such.

No wonder, then, that what goes by the name of political philosophy or theory today is rather angelology. In an otherwordly space—perhaps separated from this earth by a "veil of ignorance"—beings who are no longer, or not yet, truly human deliberate over the conditions under which they would consent to land on our lowly planet and don our "too solid flesh." They hesitate a lot, as well they might, and their abstract reasonings are complex and multifarious, if so hypothetical that they carry little weight. Political thought cannot indulge indefinitely to live in an atmosphere that is at the same time rarefied and vulgar. Totalitarianism, it is true, has been defeated without much contribution from political philosophy, and democracy seems to sail on unchallenged. But even in practical terms, it is not prudent to lean exclusively on the workaday virtues of the democratic citizenry.

We need to recapture something of what democracy left behind in its march to supremacy. Modern democracy has successfully asserted and realized the homogeneity of human life, but it is now required to try to recover and salvage the intrinsic heterogeneity of human experiences. The experience of the citizen is different from that of the artist, which in turn is different from that of the religious person, and so on. These decisive articulations of human life would be hopelessly blurred if the current conceit prevailed that every human being, as "creator of his or her own values," is at the same time an artist, a citizen, and a religious person—indeed, all these things and more. Against this conceit, political philosophers should undertake to bring to light again the heterogeneity of human life.

It might be argued that this heterogeneity is adequately taken care of through the public acknowledgment of the legitimate plurality of human

values. Nothing could be more mistaken. As Leo Strauss once tersely remarked, pluralism is a monism, being an -ism. The same self-destructive quality attaches itself to our "values." To interpret the world of experience as constituted of admittedly diverse "values" is to reduce it to this common genus, and thus to lose sight of that heterogeneity we wanted to preserve. If God is a value, the public space a value, the moral law within my heart a value, the starry sky above my head a value . . . what is not? At the same time, for this is confusion's great masterpiece, the "value language" makes us lose the unity of human life—this necessary component of democratic self-consciousness—just as it blurs its diversity: you don't argue about values since their value lies in the valuation of the one who puts value on them. Value language, with the inner dispositions it encourages, makes for dreary uniformity and unintelligible heterogeneity at the same time.

Certainly Max Weber would look with consternation on a state of things he unwillingly did so much to advance. As *Science as a Vocation* makes clear, he devoted his uncommon strength of mind and soul to the task for which I have just entered my feeble plea: to recover, or to salvage, the genuine diversity of human experiences. He was undoubtedly right to underline that the Beautiful is not the same as the Good or the True. But then, or so it seems to me, he crossed the line. Why interpret this internal differentiation of human life as a conflict, even as a "war"—the "war of the gods" attendant to the "polytheism" of human "values"? Why say that we know that some things are beautiful *because* they are not good? Why say that we know that some beings are good or holy *because* and *inasmuch* as they are not beautiful? It seems that Weber here let himself be carried away by the restlessness of his spirit. How impatient we moderns have become! If two things don't match exactly, then they must be enemies.

Perhaps we have been impatient and restless from the beginning. Was not Descartes, the father of Enlightenment, as well the father of our impatience when he deliberately equated what is doubtful with what is false? How much wiser in my opinion was Leibniz,* who tranquilly countered that what is true is true, what is false is false, and what is doubtful is . . . well, it is doubtful. We need Leibniz's equanimity more than Descartes' impatience, so that we may sojourn within our different experiences, and draw from each its specific lesson.

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* Leibnitz. See note on page 329.

The same human being, after all, admires what is beautiful, is motivated by what is good, and pursues the truth. Sometimes he comes across a "brave bad man," as it befell Lord Clarendon;* or he meets a fair treacherous woman. These complexities, sometimes even incongruities, of human experience need to be described accurately. Generally, the more bold the colors, the less exact the drawing. Human life does not warrant despair, and the social sciences do not warrant nihilism, because human life is humanly intelligible.

It is possible, even probable, that the democratic regime could not have come into being without the impatience of Descartes and others; it is possible as well that democratic citizens would have fallen asleep if not for the strident clarion calls of Weber and others. But victorious and mature democracy would do well to temper these extreme moods and open itself to the inner diversity of human experience as it claims to be open to the outer diversity of the human species. This would seem to be a tall order: for now, at least, few political philosophers have given it heed.

* In his *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, Edward Hyde, the First Earl of Clarendon, says posterity will look upon Oliver Cromwell as a "brave bad man."