



## **The Assault on the French Enlightenment**

This PDF is one of a series designed to assist scholars in their research on Isaiah Berlin, and the subjects in which he was interested.

The series will make digitally available both selected published items and edited transcripts of unpublished material.

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# The Assault on the French Enlightenment

These three John Danz Lectures were delivered and recorded on tape on 22, 24 and 25 February 1971 at the University of Washington. A contemporary transcript of the recordings found in Isaiah Berlin's papers was edited and posted online in the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library in 2005. In 2025 the recordings, previously presumed lost, were discovered in the UW archives, and digitised. It turned out that the original transcript contained a large number of gaps and inaccuracies, and a completely new transcript appears below. References have been provided for all identified quotations. Because recordings exist and are publicly available (see links below), the new transcript has been kept closer to the spoken word than might otherwise have been the case, to reduce any discomfort experienced by those who listen to the lectures with the transcript before them as a guide; but a few remaining errors have been identified and some infelicities ironed out.

HENRY HARDY  
19 February 2026

## RECORDINGS

- 1 [Herder and Historical Criticism](#)
- 2 [Kant and Individual Autonomy](#)
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# 1 Herder and Historical Criticism



The University of Washington presents

## JOHN DANZ LECTURER

**Sir Isaiah Berlin**  
Professor of Social and Political Theory  
President of Wolfson College, Oxford University

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*THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT*

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Lecture One  
*Herder and Historian*  
Monday, February 22, 1971, 8 p.m.

Lecture Two  
*Kant and Individual Autonomy*  
Wednesday, February 24, 1971, 8 p.m.

Lecture Three  
*Fichte and Romantic Self-Assertion*  
Thursday, February 25, 1971, 8 p.m.

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HEALTH SCIENCES AUDITORIUM      ADMISSION BY COMPLIMENTARY TICKET

*Mailshot for the lectures, with an erroneous title for the first lecture*

### The John Danz Lectureships

In October, 1961, Mr. John Danz, veteran motion picture theater owner and philanthropist of the Pacific Northwest, and his wife, Jessie Danz, made a major gift to the University of Washington. The gift is called the John Danz Fund and is of enduring benefit to the University and the state of Washington.

The John Danz Fund is used to bring to the University and to the state of Washington each year "... distinguished scholars of national and international reputation who have concerned themselves with the impact of science and philosophy on man's perception of a rational universe."

The terms of the gift also provide the Board of Regents with wide discretion in the use of the income for purposes that will strengthen and advance the academic program of the University.

Each year, a John Danz Lecturer has been nominated by the John Danz Lectureship Committee and appointed by the Board of Regents of the University. The names of these Lecturers and the titles of their lectures are as follows:

<i>John Danz Lecturer</i>	<i>Title</i>
Sir Julian Huxley	The Human Crisis
Dr. Richard Feynman	A Scientist Looks at Society
Dr. Fred Hoyle	Of Men and Galaxies
Dr. George Boas	The Challenge of Science
Dr. Francis Crick	Of Men and Molecules
Dr. Isidor Rabi	Science and Humanity
Dr. Loren C. Eiseley	Man: The Last Magician
Dr. Philip Morrison	Two Apples: The Affirmation of a Physicist
Dr. Hans A. Bethe	Science, Technology, and the Quality of Life
<i>John Danz Visiting Professor</i>	
Sir Rudolf E. Peierls	Views from the Other Side

Several of these lectures have been published in book form by the University of Washington Press.

*From the leaflet about Berlin's lectures*

## THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

SOLOMON KATZ<sup>1</sup> Ladies and gentlemen, as a connoisseur of ironies, I particularly relish this occasion, for a historian whom nobody knows has been called upon to introduce a historian and philosopher whom everybody knows. And rather than try to find some persuasive reason why I should have been accorded the honor of introducing our distinguished John Danz Professor, let me simply accept the privilege and pleasure of welcoming him to our campus on the occasion of the first of a series of three lectures which have been made possible by the vision and the generosity of Mr and Mrs John Danz.

In this winter of our budgetary discontent, when many of our programs may have to be reduced, we have the more reason to be grateful to Mr John Danz and his wife Jessie Danz, who ten years ago made a major gift to the University of Washington, and established the fund, the John Danz Fund, which is of lasting value to the University of Washington and to the larger community.

Relevance has become the slogan and sometimes the battle cry of the student generation, and perhaps no one in academe today is more sensitive to the meaning of relevance than the historian. In my own undergraduate days, it was a question that was seldom if ever raised, and we young historians were content to accept the integrity of history, and its value as a humane study, without question as to its utility or relevance. Indeed, many of my contemporaries were in a very real sense fundamentalists for whom history was revealed truth, flowing from documents which might be subjected to searching philological or textual criticism, but whose content, once established, fixed the account of history as it actually was.

If an occasional question arose, we were rather like the two Jesuits about whom Ranke tells us, who were sent to convert Christina of Sweden. Those two great experts in theology found the problems raised by the Queen so stimulating that, as they reported to the home office, thoughts occurred to them during the talks which they had never thought before and which they promptly forgot afterwards. Our speaker, Sir Isaiah Berlin, was one of that courageous band of scholars who raised fundamental and disturbing questions about the nature of history, and who, by shaking our faith and certainty, made us more sophisticated in our approach to the study of history.

In reviewing his inaugural lecture, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, given at Oxford in 1958, *The Times Literary Supplement* noted, 'Professor Sir Isaiah Berlin owes his large and catholic reputation, which extends beyond academic circles, to the fact that he so obviously dissents from the narrow, constricting belief that academic gifts and qualities are only properly expended in the pursuit of academic issues.'

<sup>1</sup> Solomon Katz (1909–90), professor of history, University of Washington.

## HERDER AND HISTORICAL CRITICISM

[...] he takes as his natural province issues that are of universal contemporary interest.<sup>1</sup>

The facts of Sir Isaiah Berlin's distinguished career have been set forth in the program and I shall not repeat them here *in extenso*. He comes to us from Oxford University, with which he has been associated during his academic career, and where he is today Professor of Social and Political Theory,<sup>2</sup> and President of Wolfson College. He is the recipient of many honors, and holds honorary degrees from universities in Britain and the United States. Of his many books, I single out for your special attention his *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, *The Age of Enlightenment*, *Historical Inevitability*, 'History and Theory',<sup>3</sup> and perhaps his most widely known book, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, which deals with Tolstoy's philosophy of history in *War and Peace*, but touches also upon the moral problem, as well as upon the problem of the meaning of history.

In history, as a leader in *The Times Literary Supplement* remarked a few years ago, careful scholarship is not everything, and the final assessment must be judgement upon the historian as thinker, a measurement of imaginative power. These are the qualities that Professor Berlin has brought to us in his books, and will demonstrate in this series of John Danz lectures. Careful scholarship, yes, but even more than that, profound thought and, in full measure, imaginative power, which enables him and us to recognize the relations of value to fact.

It is a high honor to present Sir Isaiah Berlin to this audience in the first of his three John Danz Lectures on 'The Assault on the French Enlightenment'. This evening's lecture is entitled 'Herder and Historical Criticism'. I assure Sir Isaiah that we are honored by his presence and we're grateful to him for joining the other distinguished scholars whose presence on our campus has been made possible by the generosity and the vision of Mr and Mrs John Danz.

Sir Isaiah.

ISAIAH BERLIN Ladies and gentlemen, I must begin by thanking Professor Katz for his very kind, over-kind introduction of me, and only hope that I shall live up to about half his expectations. Even that would satisfy me. I also wish to express my gratitude to this university and to the founders of this series for doing me the honour of inviting me.

I ought to make several apologies. The first is for the fact that there are one or two misprints in the text of the titles of the lectures which are entirely due to my poor handwriting. But if my handwriting is poor, it is as nothing to my general audibility, which is even worse. May I explain to you that, for reasons which I cannot control, for causes which I cannot control, I tend to talk rather

<sup>1</sup> [Wollheim, Richard], 'A Hundred Years After', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 February 1959, 89–90 at 89.

<sup>2</sup> In fact his tenure of that chair ended in 1967.

<sup>3</sup> An article rather than a book.

## THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

rapidly in a low voice. And it's possible that some people here, particularly those sitting in the back, will not be able to hear what I say. Now, I beg them, if they in fact cannot hear and wish to hear, on that assumption only, that they should do something to indicate some degree of mild discomfort by some mildly unconventional means, by waving their hands or stamping their feet, or doing something to attract my attention. I shall then endeavour to go more slowly and talk more loudly. I don't promise to succeed, but at least I'll try.

I say these things on the assumption that people in the back can hear what I say, because if they can't, it's somewhat self-stultifying. And now, if I may begin, I must start with a second apology, which is, I realise that this series of lectures is really dedicated, and very properly, to celebrating the achievements of the Enlightenment. Now, I certainly don't come to criticise it, or indeed to say anything derogatory about it. I regard the myself as a friend of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, my subject is an assault upon the Enlightenment by certain harsh critics of it who, it seems to me, have made a tremendous difference to the way in which we think, and who, if they have not actually destroyed the Enlightenment, have at any rate left it in a somewhat damaged form. The friends of the Enlightenment can learn a great deal more from its enemies than they would from mere praise. There is no better source of illumination than people who attack, and show up weaknesses in, a movement which, on the whole, one wishes to support. That is my reason, at any rate, for accepting your kind invitation.

LET ME EXPLAIN by way of introduction that the movement about which I intend to talk seems to me to be of crucial importance – I hate to use the word 'relevance', but I am afraid it is in place – of crucial importance to the history of ideas in the last century and in this one. It's one of those big shifts of opinion which seem to me to have affected both thought and action. In fact, I should like to defend the position – and if anyone wants to attack it after the lecture, I shall be interested to hear – I'd like to defend the proposition that it's the biggest single shift in what might be called general intellectual thought, or thought about many subjects, that has occurred until the present day, including Marx, including Freud, and anything else you please. I should like to maintain also that this enormous change occurred in the second third of the eighteenth century, principally in Germany.

Let me explain what I mean. There are certain thinkers who are men of genius and show it by answering questions which have been asked before, but in a manner which is more satisfactory. Let us

say Newton, or Archimedes, answered questions, let us say in mathematics or in physics, which had indeed been asked, but to which nobody had given so brilliant and so powerful or influential an answer before. That, however, is rather different from thinkers who don't simply answer questions which already exist, but who somehow transform the perspective from which questions are asked. They don't so much answer the questions as alter the nature of the questions themselves – shift the entire context in which the questions are asked – in such a way that questions of an earlier age are made to seem irrelevant or obsolete.

Such shifts have occurred not very frequently in human history. When Pythagoras appeared on the scene, and mathematics was for the first time applied to the external world, this must have made an enormous difference to the outlook of people who had previously been brought up with some Homeric world-picture in which things were due to chance or the intervention of individual divinities. Something of the sort must have occurred when the notion of creation was introduced. When the Jews and the Christians introduced the notion of creation out of nothing, by God, this was genuinely alien to the then classical world: there was no real notion of creation among the Greeks. Even the demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*, who creates a world, creates it according to a plan which is from eternity, which he doesn't himself invent. The idea of inventing something absolutely new and creating something out of nothing – the whole notion of creativity – obviously burst like a bombshell upon the then classical world and produced a definite shift of consciousness. Every category, every concept was somewhat affected by it.

The same can be said of the seventeenth century, when the notion of teleology was succeeded by that of mechanism. A man who lives in a world in which everything has a purpose – every stone, every plant, every human institution is in some way striving towards fulfilling itself, towards realising some inbuilt goal – and who can therefore explain everything in terms, say, of instruments in an orchestra, all of which are playing according to some preconceived plan, preconceived either by a personal god or by a

personal nature – a man who lives in a world like that, in which everything strives to complete itself, strives to fulfil some kind of inner purpose, is quite different from the man for whom there are just things lying about, just one event after another, in a world where stones are stones, plants are plants, with no particular purposes: the only purposes there are, are the purposes which men have given to things. Clocks have purposes because men have made them for a purpose. Stones have no purposes, because they are just brute facts, created by nobody and nothing, and simply lying about, whose laws of behaviour – what is next door to what, what is later than what, what is simultaneous to what – it is the business of the scientist to establish. Such ideas really do create a total change of categories, of perspective, and it is with a change of this magnitude that I intend to deal in these three lectures.

Let me continue by saying that I propose grossly to oversimplify the issue, otherwise I don't think I can place it before you, even three lectures. Let me begin with a generalisation. I think it wouldn't be altogether false to say – I won't go further than that – it won't be wholly misleading to say that the central doctrine of Western thought, from the Greeks onwards, rests on three legs – it's a kind of tripod resting on three legs – or it can be reduced, as I say, by gross oversimplification, to three propositions. The first proposition is that to all real questions there must be one true answer. A question is not a question unless there is an answer. If there is no one true answer, one and only one true answer, all the other answers being false, then the question is not a question. This has been asserted by positivists in our day, but it is certainly as old as Plato. The assumption is that to every question there must somewhere reside an answer, whether we know it or not.

The second proposition concerns questions of value – how we should live, what we should do, what is right, what is wrong – questions in moral philosophy about whether honour is to be preferred to love, whether patriotism is to be preferred to friendship, or whatever it may be. Serious questions in morals, like serious questions in politics – why we should obey anyone, why we should obey kings, governments, parliaments, majorities, minori-

ties, elites, specialists, whatever it may be – questions of this type are, like questions of fact, capable of one true answer, which must be discoverable somewhere. The only problem is to find the correct method, and the correct method must exist; otherwise the question is not a real question, but merely a set of words with a question mark after them, hiding some kind of confusion.

The third proposition is that all the answers to these questions, all the true answers, must be compatible. They may, in fact, involve each other, but they must be compatible, because one true proposition can't be logically incompatible with any other true proposition.

These are very important propositions, all these three, but particularly the last one, because on the assumption that all these answers are compatible rests the proposition that you could formulate, in terms however general, some kind of notion of a perfect world, of a perfect form of life, which simply was the realisation in practice of all the true answers put together, like bits of a jigsaw puzzle. And that I think underlies the whole of the central tradition of Western philosophy, whether Christian or pagan, whether rationalist or mystical.

There are, of course, vast differences. The differences occur, for example, about where you are to look for the answer, how you ought to find it. Some say the answer is to be found in sacred books, others, in the revelation given to prophets or priests, or holy men, or mystics; others say, on the contrary, in some metaphysical insight given only to philosophers after a special period of training. Others think it is not philosophers but scientists: the answer lies in the laboratory, in observation, in experiment. Or there are people who say that the answer is that of majorities, that democracies have the answer, or, on the contrary, minorities, some kind of group of qualified experts, some elite; some say the Pope, some say shamans, some say not there either, but perhaps in the breast of a simple, pure man, as Rousseau thought, in some innocent child's mind, or that of some untutored savage, not corrupted by the hideous sophistication of our cities; and so forth. In other words, people differ about who has the answer, but everyone agrees that the answer must be capable of being found somewhere.

Again, who is the authority? Is it majorities or minorities, is it specialists, or is it any man with common sense? Or perhaps we can't discover the answer at all – perhaps we are too sinful, perhaps we are too stupid, perhaps we are too lazy, perhaps our minds are not powerful enough. Well then, there are people who say the answer was known once upon a time, in the Garden of Eden, and after Man's Fall the answer disappeared. Others place the golden age in the future: we don't know now, but one day we shall be omniscient, if we progress far enough. Or people may say we shall never be able to discover the answer – we are too feeble or we are too corrupt. Or perhaps people will say men do not know the answer in this life, but they will know it in the next; or men do not know it, but angels do; angels don't know it, but at least God does – somebody must be capable of knowing the answer. Unless the answer is in principle knowable to somebody, the question isn't a real question. That I think is the underlying assumption of the entire Western affair.

That is really what underlies the great doctrine that virtue is knowledge. 'Virtue is knowledge' is not a self-evident proposition – why should the virtuous also be knowledgeable? The answer is quite plain: if, in fact, we have certain desires, we have certain inclinations, we have a certain kind of nature which strives for whatever it does strive, then the only way in which we can satisfy it is by understanding ourselves and understanding the world and understanding our relation to it. Only if we understand will we go for the correct goal. All error, all vice, all crime is founded upon misunderstanding either the means or the ends. If a man knows that twice two is four, he doesn't think it's five and a half. If a man knows that what will make him happy is this rather than that, one kind of existence, say a rational life, rather than an irrational one, then, according to this doctrine, he couldn't possibly go for an irrational life, knowing that it'll make him miserable. The whole doctrine, from Plato onwards, says: unless you understand reality and understand yourself, you will not be able to discover how to live or how to fulfil those purposes which in fact you have. If you make a mistake, if you misunderstand reality, if you think, for

example, that crime pays or that it is possible to achieve your ends by ignorance or indolence or something else, then, by God, reality will get you in the end. That is the threat which is uttered by all the rationalist philosophers throughout history.

Therefore 'Virtue is knowledge' simply means it's impossible both to know how to get what you want and not to go for it in that way. If you do that – if you know that means X will lead to the end Y, which you want, and don't adopt means X – there must be something lunatic about you, you must in some way be irrational. To take the wrong road to a goal to which you know the right road is not, if it *is* your goal, something which a sane human being does. Hence virtue – that is to say, what makes you wise, happy, good, free, and brings you all the other blessings – is a matter of knowing. And the people therefore who are admired during this period are those who know: sages, people who get things right, successful persons – successful in some lofty sense, but still successful, whether soldiers who conquer territories or profound philosophers who understand the truth; but admiration always goes to him who is successful, him who knows, the sage. All this alters greatly.

Of course bloody wars have been fought about who is right and who is wrong, between Muslims and Christians or Protestants and Catholics, because after all everything depends upon it. If salvation depends upon the correct route to the secret treasure, then nothing is too dear to be sacrificed for it. That is why it's quite natural there should be fearful struggles. But what both sides accepted is that there *is* a road. The question is, 'Am I right, is he right, are we both wrong?' – but there *is* a road, there must be a road, otherwise what are we doing, how could we even ask the question?

In particular, during the period of which I speak, in the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth, the enormous success of the physical sciences, the vast triumphs of Galileo and Newton dazzled, and quite naturally dazzled, the minds of a great many intelligent persons. If Newton was able, with a very few simple propositions, to produce a set of truths from which you could deduce the position and movement of every particle of matter, and in this way stopped a lot of wild medieval

speculation in astronomy and physics which had no empirical and no scientific basis, then by God why can this not be applied to those regions where obscurity and confusion and chaos still exist, namely the regions of values – ethics, politics and the like? Here, too, by applying rigidly the methods which were so triumphant in the realm of nature, we shall be able to clear up this scandalous mess, these hundreds of answers which have been given throughout history, none of them able to prove themselves, none of them able to be demonstrated; but once we apply this great machine, here too the Augean stables will be cleansed, and at last we shall discover what the ends of man are, what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what the proper way of government is, what the right life to be lived by a rational sane human being must be. That is certainly the hope of the eighteenth century, influenced, as I say, by the great success of physics.

How is this to be done? The French Encyclopedists thought it must be done by education and by legislation. Why has mankind suffered for so long? Why all this vice, this misery, this suffering and this frustration? A favourite view, particularly propagated by Voltaire, was that this was due to a great many knaves who took in a great many fools. The whole thing is a kind of conspiracy: there are always groups of people grasping after power who throw dust in people's eyes and teach them all kinds of nonsense in order, simply, to retain power in their hands – sometimes individuals, sometimes classes, sometimes whole countries. If you can expose these charlatans, if you can show them up for what they are, then at last a new age for mankind might dawn. And this can be done by establishing proper principles of research – public, intersubjective, capable of being checked by any intelligent man coming to the problem – not a cult confined to the breasts of a special set of beings, lamas or priests, whoever it might be, who simply claim a monopoly over these things, the better to enslave the rest and make them do the will of the dominant majority: the kings, the conquerors, the generals, the priests, who are regarded simply as malefactors, persons who simply enslave mankind for their own advantage. This is again a very simplified account, but this is cer-

tainly the kind of indignation which broke out in the eighteenth century against this vast accumulation of religious and metaphysical nonsense, as it was thought, which had beclouded the eyes of men and which prevented them from attaining the truth.

Well then, this new rational method must now be employed. Therefore, ultimately, legislation must be introduced to eliminate the cheats and the charlatans and put lucid-minded, honest scientists in charge. Education is not enough, because people might not be willing to be educated in that way – tradition is too strong, the prejudices die too hard, there is too great a vested interest on the part of all kinds of corrupt groups. Something stronger is needed; example and precept are not enough. Mankind has had enough of them, said Helvétius. We need something stronger: we need laws, we need something which will stop people from propagating nonsense and planting misery where health might be, and regarding disease as a normal condition of mankind – particularly spiritual disease. We must stop monks, let us say, from flagellating themselves, because they cause pain to themselves; the fact that it's they who cause pain to themselves doesn't matter – anyone who multiplies pain in the world is a criminal. Therefore monks, priests and the like should be incarcerated. Whether they cause pain to other people or themselves makes no difference. We are engaged in multiplying and increasing human happiness. Men have no right to be miserable, and anyone who makes himself miserable, quite apart from his neighbours, is not serving the best interests of mankind. This was the extreme position of the most rationalist Encyclopedists in the middle of the eighteenth century.

What this view comes to is that all questions are ultimately technical – that the ends are given by nature, and if you study men, you will discover what men truly want. You will study them by means of sociology; you will study them by means of psychology; you will propagate mathematics, you will propagate chemistry and physics; all the rational sciences will be established on a sound basis. Once you have discovered what men are like, and what they need, and what will make them free and wise and good and happy,

the next problem is to provide them with it; and with enough technology, enough wisdom, enough disinterestedness, enough public spirit, by God this can be done. All problems ultimately are technical problems, because the ends are given. They are given in exactly the same way as they are given to animals or to stones. You know what a bee wants, you know what a beaver wants, by observing them – entomologists know, zoologists know. What we need is a zoology of human nature. We need scientists who attend to human beings exactly as these other scientists attend to creatures in nature. That is the programme of Condorcet, for example.

There always were, I must warn you, certain persons who cast a certain amount of doubt upon this entire programme. Even in ancient Greece there were persons called Sophists who said, according to Aristotle – or one of them at least said – ‘Why is it that fire burns both here and in Persia, but political and moral customs change under our very eyes?’<sup>1</sup> There were other persons later on, certainly various *libertins*, various sceptics in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who echoed these sentiments. Montesquieu pointed out that things which are good for Parisians are not necessarily good for Persians, that climate makes a difference, geography makes a difference, tradition makes a difference, people’s tastes vary, people’s needs vary, people’s habits vary. It is no use wearing fur coats in southern Arabia, no use wearing Arab garments in the snows of St Petersburg. The idea that there must be some universal answer to all the questions, there must be some universal propositions which will answer everybody’s questions everywhere – *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*,<sup>2</sup> universal answers true of all men at all times, in all places – cannot be quite right, because men differ, because circumstances differ.

<sup>1</sup> More literally: ‘Some people think that all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas a law of nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary.’ *Nicomachean Ethics* (335–322 BC) 5. 7. 2, trans. H. Rackham (London, 1926), 295. The sophist IB means (not mentioned by Aristotle) is presumably Protagoras.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* [*A Reminder*] (434 AD) 2. 3.

All this is a truism now. But Montesquieu, let me say, even though he said these things, said something much more sinister. He said: When Montezuma said to Cortés, ‘Your religion’, i.e. the Christian religion, ‘may be all very well for Spaniards, but the Aztec religion suits my people best’, what he said, says Montesquieu, was not absurd.<sup>1</sup> When Montesquieu said that, he was fallen upon by both sides – obviously by the Christians, by the Roman Church: if the truths of Christianity are true, then obviously Montezuma’s subjects believed in a lot of soul-destroying nonsense. Equally, the Encyclopedists and the atheists believed that if what Christianity preached was false, it was mistaken to say it was all right for the Spaniards, and equally wrong to say that the religion of the Aztecs would suit Montezuma’s subjects. Either/or – either it’s true or it’s false. The idea that something which is true here may be false there, or something which is true here may be useful there, something which is useless here may be useful there, struck both sides as a remark of a corrosive and destructive cynicism.

But even Montesquieu, even the sceptical, doubting man who for the first time really spelt out the notion that different things are believed in different places – the whole, now familiar, notion of relativity of value – even he wasn’t really as subversive as all that. All this really comes to is that different means are used in different circumstances. Even he didn’t deny that all men wanted peace rather than war, warmth rather than cold, food rather than starvation, sexual procreation rather than total celibacy, and the like. They all needed something or other, but the means toward it in the Russian steppes are different from those in the hills of Greece, the means towards it in Iceland are different from those in Peru, and that’s why customs vary. But the goals of men are not all that different. Even Hume, who is regarded as having blown up a great many of the presuppositions of the Enlightenment by pointing out that values are not logically connected with facts and facts not logically connected with logical statements – even Hume simply translated statements of value, which were regarded as

<sup>1</sup> *De l’esprit des lois* [*On the Spirit of the Laws*], part 4, book 24, chapter 24.

metaphysical and in some way binding on everyone, into semi-sociological statements of what people preferred or what people approved. He simply translated the truths of metaphysics into those of psychology. But even he would say that a scientist could discover what various people did approve of and how far they could be given it and how far a compromise could be struck between what A wanted and what B wanted. In short, even he supposed that science would be useful, indeed the most useful of all things, by simply discovering what it was that men felt like, what the subjective desires of men were, how they were to be satisfied – he didn't differ all that much from the programme of even the most rigorous Encyclopedists.

The people I intend to talk about were a great deal more subversive than that. They blew up, or tried to blow up, the entire affair – all the three propositions – and after them, all I can say is they never looked the same. Let me begin by giving you a preview of the kind of situation which these men were responsible for – and by 'these men' I mean Herder, Kant and Fichte in particular, and to some extent also the poet and dramatist Schiller, who was a very faithful disciple of Kant and a very competent philosopher.

In the middle of the eighteenth century people still believed that what was wanted was wisdom, what was wanted was knowledge, what was wanted was success in human endeavours – achievement – and they admired the great men, whether of thought or of action, who had somehow managed to get what they wanted, or managed, anyhow, to answer the most agonising questions of mankind. Supposing, however, you had wandered through, say, German universities round about 1810 – let's just take that year in the nineteenth century. You would have discovered that this was not at all the ideal of the average Romantically inclined student of the place. They didn't care for success. They were not interested in learning. At least, when I say 'they', I mean that famous dominant minority which sets the tone – 80 per cent, normally, go in the steps of their fathers, but there are always 20 per cent who are in some way upsetting, as no one here needs repeating. These 20 per cent, these subversive and revolutionary-minded persons, both

among the students and among the teachers, believed by this time that what was wanted was not knowledge, not skills, not clarity of thought, not security, not a happy family life, not pleasure, above all not happiness – these things they despised. They believed in defiance of conventions, they believed in originality of temperament, they believed in martyrdom, they believed in fighting against established values at whatever cost; they thought that failure was nobler than success, which was ultimately vulgar; they thought that defiance showed a greater degree of moral strength and moral passion than mere succumbing to the ordinary, conventional wisdom of their generation. They admired the bold opponents of the regime, even the Satanic, rather sinister heroes of the Gothic novels or of Byron's works. Above all, however, they prized sincerity, they prized integrity, they prized dedication to an ideal.

Consider, for example, the meaning of the word 'idealism', not in the philosophical sense, but in the ordinary sense. This is not a word which was used much before the nineteenth century. Idealism means that you admire people who are prepared to sacrifice life, riches, success, career to serving some kind of ideal which they truly, truly believe in. What the ideal is, is comparatively irrelevant. The point is they are prepared to die for it. The dying is more important than the correctness of the ideal itself. The martyrdom is more important than the validity of the thing for which the martyrs are martyrs.

Martyrdom was always prized by Christians, but that is because you died for the truth. If you died for a falsehood, it was merely pathetic, not heroic. Take, for example, the Crusades – take Christians and Muslims. You will not find, in these great battles between Christians and Muslims, a Christian saying about a Muslim, 'It is true that what he believes is damnable heresy, it is true that what he believes is terrible nonsense, but one has to hand it to him, he believes with utter sincerity, he believes with utter integrity. The heroism and the splendour of the quality of his belief transcend the fact that I happen to think the content of his belief to be inaccurate, and not to lead to salvation.' On the contrary,

people who really believe with passion, people who really believe with total self-surrender to these abominable truths, are all the more dangerous and therefore deserve to die all the more necessarily, because they are far more likely to poison society. No Catholic in the seventeenth century congratulated a Protestant upon the sincerity and purity of his beliefs. The purer the belief, the more dangerous, the more mad. If you were a gentleman, you didn't spit on your enemy's grave; but that's about all it came to. You certainly didn't congratulate him on the intensity, on the dedication, on the marvellous sincerity with which he held on to his ridiculous or dangerous views.

By the nineteenth century this was not so. By the nineteenth century there begins to be a worship of sincerity and integrity as such. If I think one thing very strongly, and you believe the exact opposite, we fight a duel, in the course of which I may kill you, or you may kill me, or we may kill each other. But any of these things is preferable to the one intolerable solution, which is that we should compromise, that we shouldn't kill each other at all; because that means that you have betrayed the inner light within you; you have decided, for the sake of the miserable desire to continue to be, to sacrifice that for the sake of which you are living. You have extinguished the light within you.

The hero of the Romantic generation – of the 1820s, for example – is some man like Beethoven, who sits in a garret, who is personally dirty, unkempt, rude and ignorant, but he serves the inner ideal with passion, integrity and absolute devotion. It's all the better, no doubt, that his music happens to be music of genius. But even if it weren't, he would still be admirable for the absolute devotion, passion and purity of heart with which he serves the flame within him. Haydn and Mozart would have been extremely astonished to be told that they were sacred vessels who testified to some deep, inner vision which they had to bind upon the souls of mankind. They were simply craftsmen, working, producing objects which they hoped the public would find beautiful. If a great many members of the public found them beautiful, they would earn a great deal of money; if not, not. They were simply purveyors who

did their best, and if they were geniuses, the objects were marvellous. They certainly didn't see themselves as artists did in the nineteenth century, as specially selected, sacred beings, with a kind of mandate to suffer, to be agonised – above all, not to sell out. The great sin was selling out – adapting yourself, conforming. This is the movement which has come to rich fruition in our own day. Its consequences I shall try to examine later, but that is the contrast between what these two kinds of people believed.

Take, for example, Balzac's story which is called 'The Unknown Masterpiece' – 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu'. You have a painter there who is mad, and who keeps on painting, putting more and more colours on to his easel, until what began by being a picture becomes an absolute chaos of unrelated daubs, bits of colour and so on, not intelligible to anyone at all. Well, this is not a masterpiece, and the painter will not be famous, but it's preferable that a man should do this, even though he may be rather off his head, even though he may be rather mad, than that he should produce picture postcards for commercial purposes, because that is obviously selling out to society, selling to the market, betraying the light within you, no longer being authentic, no longer doing your thing.

Doing your thing is the heart of the Romantic doctrine of the early nineteenth century, and it is in sharp contrast with the most advanced and luminous and rational thought of the mid-eighteenth: and something happened in between, which leads to all kinds of political consequences. Nationalism comes from it, extreme heroic individualism comes from it, anarchism comes from it, the cult of violence, the cult of eccentricity come from it, elements in Fascism come from it, elements of existentialism – all these things, which are so contemporary now, spring from this particular mood, and it has set its seal upon the individual and the public life of our time from the mid nineteenth century onwards, more than today. It is with the rise of this doctrine, and with how the paradigm of the Enlightenment, particularly in the eighteenth century, came, if not to be broken, at any rate to be severely damaged, that I wish to deal.

One of the persons who is most responsible for this is the German historical philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder was born in East Prussia; he was a poor boy and suffered all his life from a peculiar hatred of the 'smarter culture' of the French West. Let me say something about Germany at this point. Naturally, ideas are not parthenogenetic: ideas don't breed ideas in a vacuum. They have some connection with the lives that men lead – economic lives, social lives, however you wish to interpret them. And they arise, not necessarily as a result of, but at any rate as factors in, a larger world which does not consist simply of ideas in the heads of intellectual persons, but of the lives of the society into which they are born. In some ways they are causes, but they are also symptoms, and they are heavily bound up with the social history of their time. It's not Marx alone who has taught us this truth, but he certainly emphasised it.

There is something peculiar about the whole German position since the Renaissance. Germany can really not be said to have had a proper Renaissance, in the normal sense of the word. If you had travelled across Europe in, say, 1500, you would have found that German art, German culture was no whit inferior to, was of the same sort as, that of the other countries through which you passed – the cultures of Burgundy, the culture of France, the culture of Italy, the culture of other countries. If you did exactly the same thing in 1600, you would have found Germany to be somewhat provincial in character. The age of Dürer, the age of Grünewald, the age of Reuchlin had passed. If I ask you to mention a single great German name, someone who contributed something to human culture between, say, 1570 and 1670 – before the Thirty Years War, to which this is usually attributed – it's very difficult to find anyone. There was Kepler, no doubt, who was a kind of eccentric astrologer near Munich. There was Althusius, who was a respectable thinker but not exactly of the front rank. If I ask you

what your views are about Gryphius<sup>1</sup> and Moscherosch, I wouldn't expect you to give me the answer immediately. These are persons who occur in respectable histories of German literature. Claudius is quite a good poet. There *are* German names: they are not uncivilised, by no means – the general level of education is very high. But there are no outstanding persons, and if you compare the cultural contribution of Germany during this period, apart from Luther and theology, to that of France, which is going through one of its most brilliant periods, to that of Italy, even during the late Renaissance, to that of Holland (about which I needn't speak, with the rise of both science and painting on an unexampled scale), to that of England, even to that of Sweden in that particular period, you will find that Germany is something of a backwater. And the feeling that somehow they are inferior, that somehow the real things are going on elsewhere – that it's really in Paris, it's really in perhaps Venice, it's really in London, it's really in Amsterdam that real progress is made and people are excited, that new truths are being discovered, that money is being made, that pictures are being painted, that life is being lived in some more intense fashion, that a larger richer culture is developing – this begins to oppress the Germans at quite an early phase.

Until the rise of Leibniz and the thinkers and the musicians, say, of the eighteenth century, Germany feels herself in an inferior position vis-à-vis the West. And this leads, quite naturally, to a profound sense of humiliation, particularly vis-à-vis the French, who are the top of the world, who are militarily and scientifically and culturally and linguistically and in every possible respect a kind of cultural top nation, and look with infinite contempt upon these provincial clodhoppers, these beer-drinkers and pipe-smokers in Germany, who at best produced clergymen and grammarians of an unimportant kind. This is the attitude towards the Germans round about 1630, 1640, during the period of the Thirty Years War, quite

<sup>1</sup> Berlin said 'Uden', but he replaced 'Uden' with 'Gryphius' in reprints of *Vico and Herder*. Andreas Gryphius (1616–64) published four collections of *Oden* (*Odes*).

apart from the massacres which were going on in that period. And this includes portions of the Empire; it includes Vienna as well. Apart from architects, it's very difficult to think of any first-rate personalities.

When this kind of thing happens – and in particular when political impotence is very strong, as it was in Germany, with her three hundred principalities and all these petty towns, and total subjection, encouraged by the Lutheran Church, to the temporal authority – the natural reaction to this is a retreat into oneself. Since one cannot have the fruits which the world offers one begins to teach oneself not to desire them. The Stoics, at the time of the collapse of the city state, were precisely in this frame of mind. A kind of, I don't say escapism, but up a retreat in depth into a sort of inner citadel begins. I am poor: the only way in which I can console myself about being poor is by saying riches are unimportant. The tyrant oppresses me: very well, political liberty doesn't matter. The tyrant is going to destroy my house: houses are of no importance. The tyrant is going to kill my family: personal ties are not the most important thing in the world.

What, then, is important? My inner soul is important – that which nobody can take away from me. A kind of contraction occurs: people try to contract the vulnerable area, they try to preserve that at which nobody can get. This is before the age of psychological penetration, before the age when people began to brainwash other people; and you really thought that your inner life was somehow protected from the behaviour of your enemies, of the tyrant, of people who oppressed you, whether foreigners or people who were part of your own nation. And so you get, as with the Stoics, a kind of protection of the inner citadel. If you like, the idea is: if I can't have something, I must teach myself not to want it. If I can't have what I want, I must teach myself to want only what I can have. And if it's very little, then I contract myself into the smallest possible space. My inner life nobody can take away. My music nobody can take away. My thoughts nobody can take away. Anything which needs money, anything which needs political liberty, anything which needs grandeur, anything which needs

power, I can't do. Very well then, these things are dross, are nothing. My religion teaches me to despise these things. If I can't have them, I refuse even to consider them; I make myself free of them by not being tied to them. A kind of Buddhist process begins of trying to detach myself from things which otherwise might enslave me.

This is particularly strong in the most derelict and the most abandoned part of Germany, the poorest and the most old-fashioned – East Prussia, where the culture of the West has hardly penetrated by the end of the seventeenth century. It's only beginning to do that. And it's there that you will find two of my thinkers – namely Kant and Herder – both East Prussians. One lived in Königsberg, the other ultimately travelled to the West, but began his life, at any rate, in East Prussia, in Königsberg too – or near it, rather, in Mohrungen, in Prussia. These are the people who feel themselves part of a most abandoned society, where desire for material goods has been artificially suppressed by an intensive inner process of attending only to the spiritual life. That's what the pietist movement was about: intense self-preoccupation, belief only in personal values, your conscience and your direct relationship to God. Away with priests, away with magnificence, away with pomp, away with ritual – all these things are for the rich and the grand and somewhere else – away with art, away with political power, away with large forms of social self-expression: a kind of glorified provincialism. East Prussia was a place to which Frederick the Great had brought his French officials to put it in order; and the humiliation of having to face these French officials, with their obstinate French language and their extreme contempt for these primitive Prussians, is one of the causes of the extreme resentment of Parisian values which the thinkers of whom I am about to speak had.

These are the circumstances in which Herder grew. He started as a literary critic, a critic of language and of literature, and it's from this that his whole doctrine begins to develop. The doctrine of the French Enlightenment was, of course, that there were certain truths in aesthetics, as in everything else. Even Montesquieu, who

is such a relativist in politics, knows very well, when he goes around the museums in Italy, which pictures are good and which pictures are, because there are certain rules which we apply quite mechanically to them. These rules are eternal, universal and easily learnt. Sir Joshua Reynolds, when he delivers his lectures in London, is quite clear that there is a thing called 'the Great Style'. The Great Style means that there are certain original prototypes of all artistic experience which every painter should seek to reproduce. For example, he says: if you should wish to paint King David, it may be that in life David was a mean little fellow with a harelip; nevertheless, if you are to paint him you must paint him as a royal personage; a royal personage is not small, is not mean, and does not have a harelip. And therefore you must paint David as a king, and the notion of a king is something eternal. There is a universal prototype of what it means to be a king; there's a universal prototype of what it is to be a sea, a river, a house – this is the Great Style. You do your best to copy these great Platonic originals, these great immutable originals which, like mathematical figures, are untouched by change and time. If you have a special eye, if you have genius, if you have learned the laws of perspective, if you understand the rules of art, then you will try to reproduce these things in some medium or other. Above all – and this is the theory of mimesis, of imitation – don't copy directly from nature: nature may not come up to expectation, nature may not reveal what is really behind nature, which is a magnificent series of perfect examples of that which you wish to paint, upon which your true eye should be directed.

And what is a work of art? A work of art is something which is beautiful and which those who have an eye to see will recognise to be beautiful because it'll obey the laws which make things beautiful, the rules which are just as universal, just as objective, just as open to any man at any time in any place as the rules of ethics, the rules of politics, the rules of chemistry, the rules of physics, or the rules of anything whatever. That is the eighteenth-century doctrine.

The same applies to poetry. Augustan verse is preferable to the rough hexameters of some early, pre-Vergilian poet. We know that:

there is progress in the arts. They were crude and primitive, we are civilised and nearer perfection. The ideal is the same for everyone: some are further from it, some are nearer. History may not move in a straight line – there may be moments of progress and moments of retrogression – but the ideal towards which men with sense, with eyes to see, are tending is one and the same.

This is the proposition which Herder found quite intolerable, and he found it so for this reason. To the critics of the eighteenth century a work of art is simply what it is – the intentions and the motives of the artist are on the whole irrelevant. You want a painting, I will produce it – I, the painter. What my private opinions are, why I produce it, is perfectly irrelevant to you. You want a table: I am a carpenter, I produce a table. You have no business to ask me if I am a pious Christian, if I am a good father, if I am a respectable citizen, or what I was doing yesterday morning – this is nothing to do with it. You want a table? Here it is. What you admire is the object; the man who produced it is not relevant to the object, the object itself is what is admired – it lives in its own incandescence.<sup>1</sup> The biography of the man or his intentions are not relevant to what it may be. That is the theory of a work of art as an object independent of the creator, of a scientific theory as something independent of its inventor. It's the general theory of the fact that things are what they are and can be judged to be what they are, can be evaluated as they are, in terms of certain unaltering relevant rules.

For Herder this was a terrible blasphemy. Art for him – and he was the first person to say it fully, and this was quite a revolutionary moment – art for him is, above all, a voice speaking. It's communication between one human being and another. It's not the production of an object, it's not purveying, it's not producing something

<sup>1</sup> Possibly an echo of T. S. Eliot, who spoke of the self-sufficiency of 'the radiance shed by [...] poems themselves' in *The Frontiers of Criticism* (Minneapolis, 1956, 13. Cf. PI3 277 on David Cecil, SR2 269/2 on Gautier and Eliot. But it was Virginia Woolf who wrote of the 'incandescent' mind an artist requires in order to free 'the work that is in him': *A Room of One's Own* (London, 1929), 85 (see also *ibid.* 86, 88, 148).

which lives in its own light. Art is simply a function of the total personality of a man. A man speaks, a man walks, a man eats, a man drinks, he worships, he takes a journey, he creates works of art, he dances, he sings – all these are expressions of the total human personality, which you can't divide up into 'This I do qua artist, and this I do qua father.' If a man says, 'As an artist I say this, but as a citizen I say that,' he is lying, because this is what is now called role-playing. Man is one and undivided. Art is a natural human activity, as walking and eating and worshipping and any other human activity must be. It's simply the feeling which bursts forth and which you wish to put into some concrete shape.

Early art is meant to inspire lovers, or hunters, or soldiers, or fathers of families. It's not simply a golden box or a silver statuette to be admired by connoisseurs – this is a much later development. Art originally is a form of self-expression, in other words. And if it's a form of self-expression, then it is a form of the total personality seeking to be understood by other personalities. This seeking to be understood means that the only way in which I can understand a work of art is by understanding what the man is trying to do. When I hear a man use words, the first thing I ask myself is 'What is he saying?', 'What does he mean?'; and I understand what he means by his face, by his gestures, by the kind of man he is, by the kind of clothes he wears, by what I know about his past. The more I know about him, the more fully I realise what it is that he commands is trying to say to me. The same is true of a man who paints a picture, a man who dances a dance, or a man who tries to worship his god. It's a total expression of a human being which can be understood by other human beings only by coming into the process of some kind of acquaintanceship with him.

The same applies to the art of the past. If I am to read Homer, I can really understand him only if I understand what it was like to be an early Greek of his period. If I wish to understand the Bible, says Herder – and he was particularly interested in Hebrew, of course, because he was a Hebrew scholar, among other things – then I must not look at it as a timeless document which means exactly the same to every generation, in every country, in every

clime. This is the religious outpouring of primitive Judaic shepherds, and if I can get to the mountains of Judaea and if I can somehow translate myself into the primitive life of these Judaic shepherds, these words will have quite a different meaning for me from what they will have if they are translated into our own sophisticated language, from which the quality and the flavour and the intention very likely evaporate. That is why all translations are bad.

Someone once said: 'Poetry is what is lost in translation.'<sup>1</sup> Herder would have applauded this sentiment because what he wanted was some kind of direct communication between human beings. He tells us that on his journey from Riga on the Baltic coast to Nantes, to which he went, he went through a fearful storm off the Swedish coast. Only then did he understand, when he saw these grim sailors battling with the waves and the iron discipline which they had to display and the fearful odds they were against, only then did he begin to understand the language of the early Scandinavian skalds, of the Eddas, or various types of Nordic epic, which was conceived in, and could be understood only in relation to, the particular kind of grim and brutal nature which these men were forced to encounter.

So Herder for the first time articulates the theory that art is expression. It's not the creation of objects – it's a form of communication and creation. Creation and communication are the same for him. This is true of every province of human activity, whether it is by dance or by words or whatever it may be. And therefore the Parisians must be wrong: it isn't the case that there are certain universal, static rules in terms of which human products can be judged. The art of the skalds must be understood from the point of view of the skalds – what they were trying to do. The Bible must be understood from the point of view of these shepherds in

<sup>1</sup> Robert Frost defined poetry as 'that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation'. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* (New York, [1961]). 7. And in his *Robert Frost: A Backward Look* (Washington, 1964), 18, Louis Untermeyer reports Frost as saying 'poetry is what is lost in translation'.

the mountains. Homer must be understood from the point of view of the Greeks of his generation. Aeschylus can be understood only by someone who understands about ancient Greece, about Athens, and therefore studies not only the literature of Athens, but all its institutions, its geography, its history, its laws – wherever he can find fragments of its habits. In other words, Herder is one of the earliest thinkers to conceive of something called a culture, where every element reflects and reacts against all the other elements, and where, from any given bit, you should be able, by a species of imaginative sympathy, whatever you like to call it, empathy, *Einfühlung* he calls it,<sup>1</sup> feeling yourself into the object – you should be able to reproduce the whole, not by logical means, not by induction, not by the scientific means recommended by the French, but by some species of feeling akin to that with which you understand the thoughts of a friend, with which you understand an expression upon a human face.

Herder begins to explain what symbolism is. Symbolism is what cannot be expressed by words – the waving of a flag, the singing of an anthem, the particular kind of bold and defiant clothes which you may wear in order to shock your neighbourhood, as the German students were liable to do in the 1780s when they danced round liberty trees and grew special beards in order to shock the shaven, bewigged, conventional persons by whom they were taught. This kind of thing is something which can't be conveyed in words at all, because if you ask yourself 'What does a Gothic cathedral actually say?', you can't say what it says; but it certainly conveys, it certainly stands as an emblem or symbol of an attitude to life which is quite different from that of the ancient Greeks or that of the ancient Arabians. The emotion which you feel when a particular kind of symbol is waved at you – a flag, a handwriting, anything you wish – is something unique, and this reaction towards

<sup>1</sup> Herder does not himself use the exact term *Einfühlung*, but when in *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* [*Yet Another Philosophy of History*] (n.p., 1774), 46, he writes 'fühle dich in alles hinein' ('feel yourself into everything'), he is deploying the same concept.

something unique is totally different from what other people in some different position would experience in those circumstances.

What do the French understand about this? For Herder, these scientists, these Encyclopedists, these illuminated persons were simply a mass – some of them, at least: some he respected – but a great many were simply a mass of superficial, dry little abbés in salons, brilliant, witty, amusing, but who did not understand the depth of the human soul, that which really made men tick. Whereas the Germans, oppressed, miserable, poor, despised, lower-class as he himself was – they, partly because of their tragic condition, were driven in on themselves, and they understood what it was that made men. That I think is the original sermon. And therefore the first attack is upon the notion of the universality of values and, above all, of the applicability of rules.

The second concept which I think we owe to Herder also is the concept of belonging. He was the first person who really explained in vivid language what it is to belong to a group. He said: among basic human needs is not only that for food and for drink and for liberty of thought (which he recognised) and for procreation and for whatever the other basic human needs are – and for shelter and for protection: there is also a basic need to be amongst your own. If you ask yourself ‘What is a German?’, it’s difficult to say it in words. It’s certainly nothing to do merely with living upon a certain soil or owing allegiance to the same king or serving in the same army. There is a way in which Germans eat, drink, pass legislation, sit down, get up, do their hair, write poetry, dance – all these various activities, although they resemble the activities of other people who also do these things, have something in common which is impalpable, unanalysable, and German in character. The way in which the Portuguese eat and drink and dance, and the way in which they produce their laws, the way in which they study their history, the way they look, the way they get up and sit down, the kind of moral and political beliefs which they hold, the way in which they do their hair is more like the way in which they speak or the way in which they move or think or feel than it is like the corresponding behaviour on the part of the Germans. There is

something in common, no doubt, to the way in which the Portuguese and the German eats, or the way in which a Portuguese and a German walks, but there is also something which is not common; and if you take a German away from a society in which people communicate with him – not merely by explicit words, but by facial expressions, by the thousand impalpable, imprescriptible and unanalysable gestures and methods by which people can understand each other – if you take a German out of his milieu and put him among the Portuguese, he will feel a stranger, he will feel an outcast, you will feel an outsider, he will feel a misfit. And this sense of being a misfit is basic, and people want to avoid it. And that is why the Germans want to be Germans, why the Portuguese want to be Portuguese, why Icelanders who come to Denmark do not flourish, why the Hessian soldiers who are sent to the United States wither away, why people cannot live a satisfactory life outside the particular milieu to which they are used. And this is what he called ‘to belong’.

It has nothing to do with what is normally called race. It has certainly nothing to do with blood. But it has a great deal to do with language. Language to Herder is one of the intimate links which bind people, because people are brought up in a language, and their past, their traditions, their feelings, their whole sense of what they are and where they are, and who their friends are and who their enemies are – all this is conveyed by the nuances of a language, which is not translatable into any other language or any other medium. Hence the importance of the German language for the preservation of the German outlook. And the idea is that there is a German outlook, and there is a Portuguese outlook, and there is a Chinese outlook, and these things are different. And to say that there are values common to them, that what some wiseacre in Paris invents, say a theory of life, that democracy is best, or monarchy is best, or enlightened despotism is best, or anarchy is best, that these things, because they have been proved by some syllogistic method or by some other logical method, would equally suit the Portuguese and the Chinese, is untrue, not only for the reasons given by Montesquieu – because their environment is different, their cli-

mate, their geography is different – but because they are themselves different and they cling together. There is such a thing as to belong and there is such a thing as to be an outsider, and the most valuable of all pains, he says, the most sacred of all pains, is homesickness, nostalgia – that is a feeling native to men.

He doesn't think about states. He is against the state because the state is a great cold monster, as Nietzsche called it.<sup>1</sup> It suppresses these little local communities to a large extent; it's an artificial political entity. The real entity is some kind of neighbourhood; the real entity is a group of people using the same language, brought up in the same culture, holding similar beliefs, who feel at home and cosy with each other.

This notion of belonging, and the desire to belong, and the fact that people who don't belong don't feel well, is native to Herder. He really did invent that. And because he invented that, he denounced the cosmopolitanism, the internationalism of the French tradition. He says that a savage in his hut who loves his wife, who loves his children, is much more likely to understand the feeling of a stranger and be nice to him, whereas in the empty heart of a cosmopolitan there is no home for anybody.

This is the beginning of a certain kind of national-ism. In a latter day it fed all kinds of chauvinist and nationalist fires, and gradually evolved into the most hideous forms of pathological nationalism in the nineteenth century. But in Herder's case it was perfectly amiable. He thought of it entirely as a local affair, something which groups of human beings – and not very large groups either – have in common. Perhaps people who speak the same language, or the people who have lived on the same soil together, perhaps people who are related to each other, or have some kind of common ideals. And he did not believe in emigration, because once you emigrate you lose something infinitely valuable – assimilation always robs you of something. What he hates most of all are

<sup>1</sup> 'Staat heißt des kälteste aller kalten Ungeheuer' ('The state is called the coldest of all cold monsters'): *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 'Die Reden Zarathustra's', 'Vom neuen Götzen' [*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 'The Speeches of Zarathustra', 'The New Idol'].

conquerors, assimilators – it doesn't matter what kind. Julius Caesar is a villain because he crushed the Cappadocians, and we shall now never know what they really wanted to tell us. We shall never know what the Carthaginians, even, had to tell us, because Rome snuffed them out. Charlemagne is a villain, Louis XIV is a villain, all these great conquerors are villains. Even the British missionaries in India are villains, because, although what they do, they do in the interests of religion, they suppress native Indian customs, they assimilate the Indians, they remove their native colour, they impose all kinds of foreign dresses, foreign customs, foreign habits upon them, and in this way the native, unique, unanalysable, impalpable, deep Indianness of the Indians evaporates. Now for a Christian clergyman, which is what Herder theoretically was – he was head of the church in Weimar – for a Christian clergyman to complain that the trouble about missionaries is that they planted Christianity, which in an un-Indian religion, is really going quite far. But he did go that way, just as he complains about Klopstock's great German poem *The Messiah*, which after all celebrates the central value and the central event of the entire Christian outlook – he complains that it is not German enough.

This is Herder. And the important thing there is the notion that people can be understood only in their own context, in their own time, by some kind of direct communication. Therefore the universality of the traditional position cannot be true. It isn't true that the same values obtain. He goes on from there to the point that every nation has its own 'centre of gravity': that's where its happiness lies.<sup>1</sup> The Greeks were happy in one way, and the Romans in another. Germans in the Middle Ages were happy in one way and now in another. It's no good going back. To try to be Greek is absurd. To say 'Return to Aristotle' is ridiculous: Aristotle was a great thinker, but he was a Greek, whereas Leibniz is ours.

<sup>1</sup> 'Every nation has its *centre* of happiness within *itself*, just as every sphere has its centre of gravity!' *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* [*Yet Another Philosophy of History*] (n.p., 1774), 56.

Homer is a great writer, and one can with enormous effort enter<sup>1</sup> the clothes of the primitive Greeks; but he is theirs – only Shakespeare is ours. You must understand your own time and you must try to be as authentic as you can. Do that which the spirit impels you to do: don't go whoring after either something in the past or something far away. If you do that, if you simply express yourself right, act, be a politician in some native fashion, then maybe posterity will recognise you as a classic; otherwise you certainly have no chance.

Above all, use your own means. If you are a German, speak German; if you are a Frenchman, speak French. Herder's nationalism is of an extremely tolerant, harmonious kind, somewhat like that of the Russian populists in the nineteenth century, who didn't overstress the importance of being a Russian. Russian critics of the late nineteenth century with a populist bent adored every phenomenon which they regarded as quaint, unique, its own – they liked the Finns to be Finns, they adored Georgians to be Georgians, they studied Jewish antiquities, they studied Mongol antiquities with loving care. And Herder is really the father not at all of exclusive nationalism; for him there is no favourite nation, there are no good nations and bad nations, or important nations and unimportant nations, or top nations and bottom nations – everyone is equal. He is the father of the whole school of ethnic study, both ridiculous and serious, both serious ethnology, serious understanding of foreign peoples, sympathetic understanding of customs not at all our own, on the one hand, and all those old ladies and all those antiquarians who want the natives to be quaint, who want the native to preserve their own customs, who hate the thought of Coca-Cola being introduced into some native village. In a sense Herder is the father of all that, he is the father of a rather – I don't say woolly – a rather loose desire for variety, for quaintness, for national colour, for uniqueness, for differences, above all no assimilation, no flatness, no uniformity.

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to Giambattista Vico's terms 'a gran pena' ['with great difficulty'] and 'entrare' ['to enter']: *New Science*, §§ 34, 338; 378, 399.

Let me explain to you that the desire for multiformity is a late desire. The whole of antiquity wouldn't have understood you if you had said that monotony was bad; for antiquity, broadly speaking, one is good and many is bad. But by the time you get to the eighteenth century, that is to say, by the time you get this enormous monopolistic attitude of the French Enlightenment, and a kind of crushing superiority in matters of politics, of ethics, of art and everything else, on the part of the mandarins of Paris, you get a longing on the part of the humiliated Germans for variety, for their own, for uniqueness, for doing things in their own way. And this is where all that is born.

One more thing, and I shall cease. There is one large implication in what Herder says which is of crucial importance for what I said. If you remember, one of the propositions I uttered was that, according to the Enlightenment, there is only one true answer to each question, and all these true answers are compatible with one another. Therefore, if you say 'What is perfection?', perfection is the putting together of all the true answers into one jigsaw puzzle, and then we know what the perfect life would be; maybe we can't attain to it, because we are too weak or because it's utopian, but at least we know what perfection is, otherwise what do we mean by saying we are imperfect? When we say we are imperfect, we mean that there is a falling short from this ideal of perfection. But if we don't know what perfection is, even, what is the point of saying there is progress, there is a goal, we are imperfect, we haven't got there yet? Where is 'there'?

If Herder is right, there is something wrong with this. Each nation, each group, each *Volk*, each *Volkseele* *orden*[?], *National-Seele* as he calls it, the national soul, the popular spirit, [has its own ideals]. (He invented the word 'nationalism', I may say, although he was not a nationalist. *Nationalismus* for Herder meant the peculiar qualities of a particular human group, living on a particular soil and using a common language and having kinship amongst themselves.) For Herder, if it was marvellous for the Greeks to be Greek, and for the Hebrews to be Hebrews – although the Hebrews were quite different from the Greeks – it's wonderful for

the Indians to be Indians, and for the Georgians to be Georgians, and for the Russians to be Russians – all of which he thought – and a great crime to try to lump them together, assimilate them, get some lurid common denominator and get them all into the same basket, then what is the point in talking about perfection? These ideals are not compatible with each other. To be a successful ancient Hebrew is to have values quite different from a successful ancient Greek – there is no marriage between Aristotle and the prophet Amos: none. There is no marriage between the ideal of Arminius in the German woods in Roman times and that of some German bourgeois in Jena. There is nothing common to the Gallo-Romans of the fourth century and some physicist or chemist or mathematician in Paris in 1770. And yet each is perfectly entitled to strive after his own ideals, because every group has its own centre of gravity within it, because the happiness of the Hebrews is attained in quite a different way from the happiness of the Swedes, because each people strives towards its own ideal, and one is not superior to the other. No period is an anteroom to another period. Voltaire is, for Herder, utterly wrong when he thinks, for example, of the Middle Ages as a peculiarly horrible corridor to the Renaissance. Herder didn't care for the Middle Ages because they were too fanatical, because they were too anti-scientific in a way, because they were too repressive, because they were too blind; nevertheless, the Middle Ages had their charms, had their values, had their outlook, which is different from that of the Renaissance. The Greeks are not a step towards the Romans, the Hebrews are not a step towards the Christians, the Italian Renaissance is not a step towards Louis XIV or anything else – each of these things has its own intrinsic value.

It's like the late Mr Wyndham Lewis, who once wrote a book called *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*. It isn't true that the later, the more developed. It's no good saying that Roman painting must be superior to Greek sculpture because it's later, or that medieval cathedrals must represent some advance upon Greek sculpture, or that Picasso must represent some advance upon Michelangelo. It doesn't make sense: each of these artistic expressions (which is

what Herder was mainly thinking about) has its own intrinsic value, not comparable to, not commensurable with, the rest.

But if this is so, I can't be both a perfect Hebrew and a perfect Greek, I can't be a perfect Frenchman and a perfect German. How are we to create a universe according to the Encyclopedists – as Condorcet would say, by finding out what men want, by giving them what they want, because all men have fundamentally the same nature, they all have the same wants, they all have the same strivings, and think they don't only because of the false doctrines propagated among them by a lot of lying priests or a lot of self-interested rulers? If what Herder says is true, then the very ideal of *the* perfect life is an absurdity. It's an absurdity because the perfect life of the ancient Greek, supposing he could lead it, would be wholly incompatible with the perfect life of the ancient Hebrew or of the modern Italian. Because Aristotle is not ours but theirs, because Shakespeare is ours and Homer is theirs, it is no use saying 'Which is superior? Which should we follow?' We mustn't follow anything, we must simply do our thing, we must express ourselves as well as we can in the terms that we have.

That is Herder's doctrine. And in this sense, he is the father of three things: first, of art as communication and not as the making of silver boxes; of art as not having a set of rules, but as being a direct expression of human beings seeking to convey everything about themselves – and therefore their social selves, their society, the whole accumulation of tradition which lives in them, the whole accumulation of the human values of their interrelationship with others, which every one of their gestures encapsulates and conveys. Secondly, he understands what is meant by saying 'belong to', and that men cannot belong to more than one group at once – they belong to where they belong and that alone is what can realise all their hidden potentialities. It's not irrelevant to a man with whom he associates: he must be among friends, he must be among people with whom there is an instinctive bond and not an artificial bond. All immigrants suffer, to some degree. And thirdly, there is this notion, as I say, that each group has its own centre of gravity, its own purpose, its own ideal; and these ideals are not

commensurable with each other, still less combinable, and therefore the very notion of *the* perfect man, *the* perfect society, *the* perfect sage is unintelligible. This is something quite different from saying, as people have said, that we shall never attain perfection because we haven't got the means, or because of original sin, or because we are not perfect, or saying, as Rousseau and others have said, that every gain entails some loss, you can't have everything. It isn't that you can't have everything, but the idea of putting these things together produces contradiction, because they are not compatible with each other.

All this Herder set in circulation. He himself believed in a garden of many flowers, all of which lived in peace with each other. So far as he was a nationalist, he was a purely cultural nationalist. He hated all forms of authority. He thought the state was a jackboot which crushed human originality. He loathed armies, he loathed war, he loathed assimilation, he loathed every form of interference. But from these doctrines that I belong to my people and I convey *their* point of view, not somebody else's, did of course spring the seeds of nationalism, which, whether in the Romantic form of Michelet and Mazzini, or in the far more brutal form of the chauvinism of the early German nationalists, say people like Jahn and Arndt, and ultimately in what developed into all kinds of pathological nationalist and Fascist doctrines this really can be attributed to the seeds so innocently planted by Herder.

That is the first attack upon the universality and the cosmopolitanism, and what Herder regarded as the dehumanising, depersonalising, excessively abstract, excessively general tendency of French thinkers who did not understand what it was to wish to express the inner life, because they had no inner life, because they were entirely absorbed in what he regarded as superficial external facts, capable of scientific generalisation. Anything which is genuine, anything which is human, anything which means something to either an individual or a group cannot be conveyed in general propositions which equally apply to groups or individuals who have grown up in a different atmosphere, who speak in a different language, and wish to convey a wholly different set of values.

## THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

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Next time I propose to talk about a very different approach by the philosopher Kant and his pupil Schiller. And I ought to add that Kant regarded Herder's views with undisguised contempt, and was paid in exactly the same coin by Herder. Thank you very much.

SOLOMON KATZ Thank you very much, Sir Isaiah, for that brilliant lecture.

May I remind you that the second lecture in the series will be given in this auditorium at 8 o'clock on Wednesday, and the third, same time, same place, on Thursday. Sir Isaiah has agreed to stay for a few minutes, not to answer questions from the general audience, but if any of you have a question to ask, just cluster round the front of the auditorium and he'll be very pleased to speak with you. Thank you.

## 2 Kant and Individual Autonomy



THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

presents

### *John Danz Lecturer*

SIR ISAIAH BERLIN

Professor of Social and Political Theory  
President of Wolfson College, Oxford University

in a lecture series entitled

THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

#### LECTURE ONE

"Herder and ~~Historian~~" *Historical*  
Monday, February 22, 1971, 8 p.m. *- Criticism*

#### LECTURE TWO

"Kant and Individual Autonomy"  
Wednesday, February 24, 1971, 8 p.m.

#### LECTURE THREE

"Fichte and Romantic Self-Assertion"  
Thursday, February 25, 1971, 8 p.m.

HEALTH SCIENCES AUDITORIUM

COMPLIMENTARY

*Leaflet with corrected title for the first lecture*

## Sir Isaiah Berlin

*past*

Sir Isaiah Berlin, ~~Professor~~ Professor of Social and Political Theory and President of Wolfson College, Oxford University, was born June 6, ~~1906~~, in Riga, Latvia. His parents took him to Britain in 1920.

*1909*

Sir Isaiah was educated at St. Paul's, London, and at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he distinguished himself in philosophy and the history of political thought. He began his academic career as a lecturer at New College in 1932. In 1957, the same year he was knighted, he was named Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford.

During World War II, Sir Isaiah was with the British Ministry of Information in New York and later became First Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington from 1942 through 1945. After the war, he also served briefly with the British Embassy in Moscow.

*a*

He is ~~the past~~ <sup>a</sup> president of the British Academy, past president of the Aristotelian Society, and a past member of the Royal Opera House Board of Directors. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of the Institute of Arts and Letters. Sir Isaiah holds honorary doctorates from the Universities of Cambridge, Hull, Glasgow, East Anglia (United Kingdom), Brandeis, Columbia, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He has lectured many times in the United States.

His books include *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, which was published in 1939 and involved a study of the background of the ideas and personalities in which Marx thought and developed his ideas. Following World War II, he authored *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, an analysis of Leo Tolstoy. His other books include *Historical Inevitability*, a critique of doctrines that deny the concept of free will; *The Age of Enlightenment*; *Two Concepts of Liberty*; and *History and Theory*.

*Corrected bio of Berlin from the same leaflet*

## KANT AND INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

[*music plays for 16 seconds; microphone is tapped*]

OTIS A. PEASE<sup>1</sup> Ladies and gentlemen: (Is this microphone alive? Can you hear me? Thank you.) In 1961, Mr John Danz, an owner of motion picture theatres and a philanthropist in the Northwest, and his wife made a gift to the University of Washington, a major gift intended to enable the University to bring to the campus each year distinguished scholars of international reputation who have, ‘concerned themselves with the impact of science and philosophy on man’s perception of a rational universe’.<sup>2</sup> Mr Danz was born in Bryansk, Russia, in 1877 and brought to the United States by his parents when he was only four years old. He worked in Portland and San Francisco as a newsboy and as a rancher in Nevada, came to Seattle in his twenties, engaged in the clothing business, and then entered the motion picture business. His formal education was limited, but he was widely and liberally self-educated, interested in liberal religious movements, especially interested in humanism. He himself organized the Humanist Society of Washington.

For years, Mr Danz contemplated the possibilities of making a significant gift to the university that would enhance its academic programs. At about this time, the academic world was celebrating the centennial anniversary of the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Mr Danz appreciated the fact that Darwin’s theory of evolution had once been widely resisted and even in places rejected, but that gradually it became accepted and 100 years later was acknowledged to be a milestone of scientific thought.

In 1961, shortly before he died, Mr Danz suggested informally the bringing of Sir Julian Huxley to the campus as the first John Danz Lecturer. There followed in the subsequent years the distinguished series of speakers whose names appear on the back of your program. The John Danz Fund, I think, will be a perpetual reminder of the generosity and vision of one of Seattle’s distinguished citizens, his wife, and his family. Mr Danz’s wife and some other members of his family are here in the audience this evening.

The present John Danz Lecturer, Sir Isaiah Berlin, is described at length in another page of the program. I will not go over any of this, save to offer a few brief corrections with apologies from the University for some clerical errors. Sir Isaiah Berlin, for example, he tells me, is a *former* professor of social and political theory because it is not possible to be a professor and a president of a college at the same time. He was also born in 1909 rather than 1906: we have restored three years to his life and he is a vice president of the British Academy rather than *the* past president.

<sup>1</sup> Otis Arnold Pease (1925–2010), professor of history and department chair, University of Washington.

<sup>2</sup> <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:80444/xv835505>.

## THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

I believe in other respects the information is correct. His books include *Karl Marx, Historical Inevitability*, later republished with an additional introduction in a book on liberty,<sup>1</sup> and the most famous book, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. I would like to think that Mr Danz, for whom surely one picture was worth a thousand words, perhaps in time came to appreciate the fact that for historians it is possible that one word is worth a thousand pictures.

In consequence, it is, I think, appropriate that his bequest provide us a chance to hear a historian. The only thing I would care to say, really, about Sir Isaiah Berlin as a historian at this point, since I think anything else I say would be superfluous, is that in reading what he has written, in hearing what he has said, one is immediately struck with the extraordinary care and precision with which he uses words. I can convey this no more appropriately than by reading simply the last few lines of *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, which was a study of the life, the thoughts and the artistry of Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy's sense of reality [Professor Berlin has written] was until the end too devastating to be compatible with any moral ideal which he was able to construct out of the fragments into which his intellect shivered the world, and he dedicated all of his vast strength of mind and will to the lifelong denial of this fact. At once insanely proud and filled with self-hatred, omniscient and doubting everything, cold and violently passionate, contemptuous and self-abasing, tormented and detached, surrounded by an adoring family, by devoted followers, by the admiration of the entire civilised world, and yet almost wholly isolated, he is the most tragic of the great writers, a desperate old man beyond human aid, wandering self-blinded at Colonus.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Berlin's subject is 'The Assault on the French Enlightenment'. Monday evening, he talked to us about Herder and historical criticism, suggested that the Enlightenment represented one of the greatest shifts in world thought and philosophy, and that it underwent a systematic critique and assault from the Romantic school; and on Monday evening, he showed us how this happened through one of the first Romantics, the historian Herder. This evening his topic, in the second lecture of the three, is 'Kant and Individual Autonomy'. I give you Sir Isaiah Berlin.

ISAIHAH BERLIN Ladies and gentlemen, may I thank Professor Pease for his very kind words about me, and above all for the corrections in the document

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, 1969), which was later incorporated into his *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> HF2 90.

which I'm afraid made me both older and more distinguished than in fact I turned out to be. Corrections on both points are most welcome.

THIS EVENING I want to talk about Kant in connection with the assault on the Enlightenment. At first this may seem to be an extremely paradoxical sort of theme, because Kant, rightly, is thought to be a hyper-rationalist figure, dedicated to precision of thought, rigour, logic, minute and severe argument, and an enemy of everything that is vague, misty, confused and, above all, Romantic. Kant himself detested even such Romanticism as occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century. He reserves some of his sternest words of disapproval for various persons whom he regards as *Schwärmer*<sup>1</sup> – people with some kind of confused, enthusiastic longing for the infinite and so forth. He was a man of rigorous thought, as I say, and dedicated to the defence and explanation of the natural sciences, on which he was a great expert, being a considerable cosmologist himself, and an analyst of unsurpassed acuteness and importance. There is something rather paradoxical, therefore, about putting him in this particular *galère*. Nevertheless, I hope I shall make good the claim which I make.

Kant, of course, is the greatest figure in modern philosophy – I don't wish to enlarge on that. He was the first person, perhaps, to state quite clearly what is the true subject matter of philosophy, and to distinguish it both from the sciences on the one hand and logic and mathematics on the other, and certainly from the ordinary findings of common sense. But this is not the aspect of him on which I propose to dwell. I propose to dwell on his moral philosophy; and not really on the whole of that, but only on aspects of it which led to the huge revolution about which I was speaking.

He did, of course, accept the triumph of the sciences completely. He dedicated himself to an analysis of why the findings of science are certain and to be believed, against the attacks upon this very view of, for example, Hume, who thought that the premisses upon which the sciences rested were mere undemonstrable belief. And, as I have already said, he had a peculiar loathing of

<sup>1</sup> 'Dreamers'.

everything that was a cult, everything which was irrational, which was wandering through the century. And let me tell you: one ought to say about the eighteenth century that although normally one thinks of it as a century of reason, a century of rationalism, a century of elegance and symmetry, underneath this glassy surface, which is usually presented to us by the historians of taste, the historians of art, and, indeed, some historians of thought also – underneath this surface there was a great deal that was turbulent, confused, occult and violent. In the second half of the eighteenth century there began to wander, particularly through eastern Europe but parts of western Europe as well, all kinds of mystagogues, all kinds of preachers, all kinds of messiahs, with and without beards, all kinds of persons who represented themselves as Christs on earth of various sorts. Some of them were harmless and rather mad, others committed crimes. This is the century of Mesmer, the century of Cagliostro, the century in which there was a great deal of table-turning by all kinds of distinguished people – by the king of Sweden, and the king of Denmark, and the Duchess of Devonshire, and the vicomte de Rohan. It was not as smooth and as quiet and as rational and as symmetrical as all that.

And if you ask why this happened, in part it happened because whenever public thought takes on too severely rational, almost pedantically rationalist, a turn, the darker forces, the unconscious forces which undoubtedly stir through the minds of mankind, seek some kind of outlet and break out in all kinds of fashions. This is certainly what happened in ancient Greece. The rationalist philosopher Aristotle, the rationalist philosophy of the Stoics were more or less simultaneous with all kinds of mystery cults, all kinds of searches for the irrational of the darkest and most mysterious kind. And this is what began happening towards the end of the eighteenth century. For example, the rise of Swedenborg and the Swedenborgian religion is a typical symptom of the outbreak of unconscious and irrational forces against the excessive tyranny of scientific rationalism.

Kant hated all this, tried to refute it, attacked it. Why, then, should I regard him as being responsible for some of these things?

While, of course, he was, as I say, a rigorous rationalist and believed in the findings of the sciences, this was only one aspect of him. There was something curiously schizophrenic about him as a thinker, because in the realms of moral philosophy he was, like Herder, brought up by the pietists. And as I think I tried to point out last time, pietists in Germany were a sect of Protestants driven in upon themselves by the humiliations and the provincialism of Germany, who believed in the inner light, who above all believed in constant soul-searching, constant searching of one's own conscience, in absolute dedication to the constant reading of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, constant self-questioning of their own motives. They disbelieved in ritual, they were not interested in learning; they were mainly interested in distinguishing right from wrong, in living upright lives; they were weighed down by a sense of sin, by the sense of corruption which goes through everything human, which they largely derived from the preachings of Luther and his followers. This led, no doubt, to a great deal of hypocrisy too, but it led also to a great deal of severe discipline and lucidity and clarity of thought. Both Herder and Kant, although they disagreed with each other, were disciples of these men.

Kant disliked Herder because he thought his generalisations were too large and too vague. He disliked him because he thought that all these huge historical generalisations were not founded on enough evidence, the method was not scrupulous enough. He also disliked Herder because he thought that Herder paid too little attention to logic, to reasoning, that both his style and his outlook were too turbid, too turbulent – no doubt interesting and suggestive, but philosophically much too confused ever to be useful in the rational progress of mankind.

Herder, on the other hand, did not like Kant because he thought he was too pedantic, too severe, because he chopped everything up into categories, because he distinguished between reason and imagination, imagination and understanding, understanding and intuition, intuition and perception, perception and sensation. All these things for Herder were artificial divisions put in by a lot of dry pedants: man was one, his body and his soul were one,

imagination overflowed into reason, reason overflowed into intuition, intuition overflowed into perception. These artificial barriers inside human beings, just like the artificial barriers inside society, were simply instituted by a lot of dry-souled pedants who didn't understand the unity either of men or of groups or of nations. In short, Kant and Herder had no sympathy with each other, and they wrote extremely disagreeable reviews of each other's works.

They were, roughly speaking, contemporaries: they were born and died within a few years of each other. They both came from East Prussia, they both came from Königsberg, which was, no doubt, the absolute seat, the heart, of the pietist doctrine. And both revolted against certain aspects of the Enlightenment. As I think I said last time, it was a very backward part of Germany, and the sudden introduction by Frederick the Great, who was a French-speaking enlightened despot, of a lot of cold and contemptuous French officials who spoke French and looked down upon these poor German hicks as a lot of totally uneducated countrymen, totally unable to understand either how to conduct life, or any of the new arts and sciences of which France was proud, produced a natural revolt on the part of these unfortunate people, and produced a good deal of fairly acute xenophobia, to which Herder gave himself with enthusiasm, while Kant, in his more modest way, tried to resist it and tried to find everything that was good in the French. But it affected both men.

Let me come back to Kant's pietist upbringing. One of the great principles, of course, of pietism was the view that man can choose between right and wrong, and that he chooses between them freely, and is meritorious only if he makes the right kind of choice. The pietists were not interested in good and evil – at least not so much. If good was to be defined in terms of what human beings desired or what made human beings happy, which was the general view of the eighteenth century, happiness was the last goal for which they were seeking. Man was not here for happiness; this was a vale of tears; he was oppressed, in any case, by a thousand ills; all he could do was to save his soul by following his conscience in all

circumstances and resisting evil, no matter how great the pressure put upon him either by men or by circumstances.

This Kant imbibed from his teacher Martin Knutzen, and believed all his life. Consequently, morality was something in which he believed very fervently. He argued that if man was to be moral – that is to say, if he was to be praised and blamed, praised for his right acts and blamed for his wrong acts – the implication of this was that he could choose between them. Only if he could choose could he be regarded as responsible for them. Responsibility therefore implies freedom of choice. If I choose to do what I do, not because I am free to choose between them, but because I am conditioned to do so, by whatever it may be – by education, by my passions, by the behaviour of my body, by the pressure upon me of my society, by any kind of force, whether the external forces of nature or the forces of nurture or, as I say, my own emotions – if I am in fact conditioned to do this, if I am simply an object in nature like stones and animals, who cannot help acting as I do, so that some men are generous because they can't help being generous and others are mean because they can't help being mean, how then can praise and blame be rationally used?

And yet one of the things Kant believed most fervently was that the one thing which all men could do was to choose between right and wrong. In fact he had begun by thinking that moral choices were dictated by some degree of expertise, that, as in chemistry, as in physics, as in mathematics, you had to have a certain degree of education, or knowledge, in order to be able to choose what was right as distinct from what was wrong, what was your duty as distinct from what was not. But on reading Rousseau's *Émile*, which is the one work by Rousseau that made a profound impression upon him, much more than the *Social Contract* – on reading Rousseau's *Émile*, which, we are told, was the only thing that ever made him miss his daily walk to his lecture, so that he was positively late for it, which was an unheard-of thing in Königsberg, because the citizens of Königsberg, it was well known, set their watches by Kant's daily, methodical walk to his morning lectures, and he lectured every day, excluding Sundays, I suppose – when he

read *Émile*, having missed his lecture on this occasion, it was because Rousseau had convinced him that in moral matters all men are experts. There is no need for expertise; no man, if he is sane at all, ignores the difference between right and wrong. He may be mistaken about what he thinks right, and he may be mistaken about what he thinks wrong, but he knows the difference. If a man suddenly says to you, 'I used to know the difference between right and wrong, but I am afraid I've forgotten it', it's not very likely that you will believe him. And this is the proposition which Kant accepted wholeheartedly.

If this was so, if all men could do this, and if you discovered a man of whom you could say that he didn't know the difference between right and wrong, you rightly judged him to be in some way not quite sane, not responsible for his acts, and you would be liable to send him to hospital rather than prison for what he did – if this was so, then surely it followed, for Kant, that men, however hemmed in they might be by this or that causal factor, must at least have a limited degree of freedom, at least to be able to choose what is right, or at least to refrain from choosing what is wrong. This seems simple enough, but all kinds of revolutionary consequences followed.

How can I be free? I cannot control the external world: the external world rolls on its way whatever I may do – I have very little power over that. I cannot even control the acts of other men. What *can* I control? I cannot be responsible for being happy. Whether I am happy or not does not lie in my power; this lies in the power of a great many factors over which I plainly have no control. What can I control? As I said last time, what is this inner self which the tyrant cannot touch, which circumstances cannot break? There must be some inner light within me which is free from interference; and this inner light guides me to the difference between right and wrong, which in all circumstances can be followed.

This entails that only those acts are moral which proceed from me, of which I am the author, which I choose, and not that which is chosen for me, which other men choose for me or which circum-

stances choose for me – that which I initiate, which I am the author of, not something which conditions me, which guides me. And therefore the whole French view, mainly of the Encyclopedists, that men are as they are because they are made of the particular flesh and blood and bone and tissue of which they are made, live in the periods in which they do, are brought up in the places in which they are – the influence of climate, the influence of geography, the influence of economic factors, the influence of social factors are, of educational factors – all these things which shape me as I am must be ignored in order to make room for that particle of freedom, that small space within which I am able freely to choose. I must be the author of my acts.

In fact, if I am as totally conditioned as Helvétius thought me to be, or as Holbach thought me to be, or as a good many of the other French Encyclopedists, under the influence of the new natural sciences, thought me to be, in what sense can I be said to act at all, rather than be acted upon? In what sense am I the author any more than the knife which the murderer uses? Godwin, somewhat later, said a man is no more responsible for murder than the knife which he uses; he is just as conditioned by nature to do what he does as the knife in his hand is conditioned to do what it does by the impulsion of the wrist.<sup>1</sup>

This is something which Kant plainly found unacceptable. The notion that human beings are in that sense robots, in that sense objects, playthings of forces outside them, he regarded as refuted by the direct moral evidence of the notions of right and wrong, by the fact that every man knew, in choosing, that this was a primary datum. This could not be an illusion any more than the perception of the external world could be a total illusion. It was just as primary a datum, and needed to be met. But clearly this wasn't wholly compatible with the scientific doctrines which the French Encyclopedists were preaching, according to which men were just as deter-

<sup>1</sup> 'The assassin cannot help the murder he commits any more than the dagger.' William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (London, 1793) vol. 2, book 7, chapter 1, 690.

mined, just as conditioned, as everything else in a causally determined nature.

The first freedom which Kant talks about is freedom from men. There is a little essay by him which is called ‘Was ist Aufklärung?’, ‘What is Enlightenment?’<sup>1</sup> in which he makes this point very clear. He speaks of human autonomy – that is to say, being conditioned by myself, being the author of my own acts, in fact the very notion of action as something which is different from mere behaviour. If somebody pushes my elbow, I am behaving; if I act, if I choose – and all men are choosers, and that is how they differ from the rest of nature – if men are choosers, then I am autonomous. If whatever is in me is not under my control – my digestive system, the circulation of my blood, various other things which affect my body in a way which I cannot altogether control, that is called heteronomy, that is to say, being conditioned by causal factors outside me.

If I am made to do what I do by somebody else, no matter how well intentioned, this is to deprive me of some primary human quality and is a form of oppression, is a form of humiliation, is a form of degradation. Let me read a quotation. There are all kinds of things which Kant disliked very much: he disliked cruelty, he disliked ignorance, he disliked indolence, he disliked all kinds of things which the Enlightenment preached against, he disliked superstition, he disliked prejudice – all these things he disliked with just as much fervour as the most illuminated, the most enlightened of the French *philosophes*. But there is something which he disliked even more, and that is the notion of paternalism. ‘A *paternalist government*’, said Kant, and I am now quoting, based on the benevolence of a ruler who treats his subjects ‘as un-grown-up children [...] is the greatest conceivable *despotism*’, and ‘destroys all freedom’.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Its full title is ‘Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?’ (‘Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?’) (1784)

<sup>2</sup> ‘Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis’ (‘On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory,

This was quite a dangerous thing to say in the kingdom of Frederick the Great, who prided himself on his benevolent paternalism – this was precisely what the regime was proudest of. Nevertheless, Kant’s inveighing against this is one of his most salient characteristics. To be treated as a child is like being treated as an animal – it’s like being treated as a horse being trained for a circus, it’s being treated like a canary. No matter how benevolent the tyrant, no matter how good his intentions, the idea of treating human beings as not being responsible was the greatest insult which you could offer to their humanity. Better, for Kant, to perform evil acts freely than to be conditioned into a smooth performance of nothing but good ones.

This really is not going to be compatible with what, for example, Helvétius taught. For Helvétius, as I think I tried to say last time, what you wanted was to produce a rational society. How did you do it? Well, men were very corrupt and they were ignorant, and they were victims of superstition and they were victims of of deception; therefore you treated them with sticks and carrots. You had to re-educate them. Re-education meant you rewarded them for good acts and you punished them for bad ones, and so you gradually conditioned them into being good citizens and you prevented anti-social behaviour.

This, for Kant, was an absolute nightmare. The idea of having a lot of men manipulated by some other men, no matter what their intentions were, into jumping through certain hoops, no matter how desirable the route through these hoops was, or how rich the reward, or how happy they might become, was to destroy their very humanity. Happiness was not the goal. God has indeed made man into a very imperfect instrument if happiness was to be his goal, said Kant. And therefore the enemy was the French utilitarians, the French *philosophes*. They were the enemy because they mistook what was human in man, and what was human in man was the

But Is of No Use in Practice”, *Berlinische Monatschrift* 22 (July–December 1793), September, 236.

freedom of his will, what was human in man was his power to choose – that’s what made him a man.

The whole notion, for example, with which we’re today familiar, of exploitation, which, after all, has had quite a career as a concept, is really something which begins with him. You may ask yourself: What is wrong with exploitation? Why shouldn’t I use somebody else for the purpose of doing something which may not be wicked or criminal at all? I use people for the purpose, perhaps, of making them happy, or of making other people happy. I send them on errands, I may have to force them sometimes if they are recalcitrant or obstinate, into doing all kinds of acts which will end in the good of society.

For Kant, to make anyone do something which is not something which he himself has clearly willed to do, to make him the instrument of my will, no matter how benevolent my intentions, is to rob him of his humanity. That’s what he calls exploitation. Therefore to use people for ends which are not their ends, to bring up people in such a way that their acts do not proceed from their purposes but from mine, is exploitation, degradation, humiliation, dehumanisation. These are all the things which are talked about now as the result of the actions, let us say, of tyrants or of the state, or of the bourgeois order or whatever it might be. But the whole notion that exploitation is the greatest evil which you can inflict upon another human being, it’s some form of enslavement, it’s some form of degradation, it’s moulding him, it’s treating him not as a human being but as a child or, worse still, as an animal, really dates from the passionate sermons on the subject of the severe rationalist Kant.

This is so far as human beings are concerned, and here Kant echoes, I dare say, Rousseau. Rousseau was, I suppose, almost the first person to say [what Kant put in these words]: ‘The man who stands in dependence on another man is no longer a man; [...] he is nothing but the possession of another man.’<sup>1</sup> Rousseau’s whole

<sup>1</sup> ‘Von der Freyheit’ [‘On Freedom’], in ‘Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen’ [‘Remarks on the Obser-

life was preaching independence of others. Men mustn't depend on each other. Dependence on others created bullying on the part of some and flattery and grovelling on the part of others. It made men perform functions and play roles and play parts which did not spring from their own clear, moral perceptions of what it was that their natures cried for, but meant they accepted all kinds of scales of moral value from other people, which they tried to serve in order simply not to be destroyed or to be bullied by these others, or in order to conform.

But even Rousseau said – and let me quote to you again – he said, I think, something like this: ‘The nature of things does not madden us, only ill will does.’<sup>1</sup> That’s what Rousseau said, and that is what the French believed, that only human ill will is what maddens you – the nature of things we accept. The French thought this, the Italians thought it, and the English thought it. But there was one nation which did not think it, and that is the Germans. Not only the ill will of human beings, but even nature appeared to them to be an obstacle to moral freedom, and this is quite a new note in European thought – not entirely new, because it’s to be found in the ancient world as well; but if it was known, it was forgotten.

Nature, you must understand, in the eighteenth century, is treated on the whole with respect and benevolence. Nature is divine harmony, nature is an organism, nature is a mechanism, nature is a hierarchy, nature is an orchestra, nature is a pyramid – there are all kinds of views of nature – but it’s always conceived of as a kind of model or ideal, and men go wrong when they break

variations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime’ (1764–5), first published (with slightly different wording) in *Immanuel Kant’s Sämtliche Werke* [*Immanuel Kant’s Complete Works*], ed. Karl Rosenkranz und Friedr. Wilh. Schubert (Leipzig, 1838–42), xi (1842), part 1, 255. *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* [*Kant’s Collected Works*] (1900–) (KGS) xx 94 lines 1–3.

<sup>1</sup> ‘[I]l est dans la nature de l’homme d’endurer patiemment la nécessité des choses, mais non la mauvaise volonté d’autrui’ [‘It is in mankind’s nature patiently to endure the necessity of things, but not the ill will of others’]: *Émile*, book 2; *Oeuvres complètes* [*Complete Works*], ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond and others (Paris, 1959–95), iv 320.

away from her, when they behave in a manner which might be called ‘unnatural’, and the important thing is to return them to the bosom of nature. Even Hume, that profound sceptic, thought that if men behaved in some unreasonable fashion, nature, like a kindly doctor, would restore them to themselves only if they leant on her and allowed themselves to be brought back to sanity and health by Mother Nature. Mother Nature, Mistress Nature, Dame Nature, nature’s apron-strings to which we are tied – nature is always spoken of with extreme benevolence in the eighteenth century, as being a kind of model which we are to follow, an ideal which we ought to understand and adjust ourselves to.

Not so Kant. Let me offer you some quotations. ‘Personality’, said Kant: ‘by this I mean freedom and independence of the whole mechanism of nature.’<sup>1</sup> If I am the plaything of nature, if causal forces which operate on trees and stones and animals operate on me too, how can I be said to be free? And he said, in a desperate sort of way, he felt trapped in a kind of cage, because you must understand that as a philosopher of science, as a man who tried to explain the external world and its workings, he was perhaps the greatest and most convincing defender of the most rigid causality in nature, and thought any deviation from that was mere irrationalism. But that applies only to external nature. That is what I mean by saying there was a certain division inside Kant. But this mustn’t extend to men. If, he says, appearances – and by appearances he meant the external world, what we see, what we smell, what we feel – if appearances were real things, things in themselves, ‘freedom cannot not be saved’.<sup>2</sup> Well, perhaps they were real; perhaps all there was, was the world as a kind of tremendous treadmill in which one thing followed another with an

<sup>1</sup> *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [*Critique of Practical Reason*] (Riga, 1788) [KPV], part 1, book 1, chapter 3, 105; **KGS** v 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*] (Riga: 1st ed. 1781 [A]; 2nd ed. 1787 [B]) [KRV], A536/B564; see also **KPV**, part 1, book 1, chapter 3, [subsection] ‘Kritische Beleuchtung der Analytik der reinen praktischen Vernunft’ [‘Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason’], 122; **KGS** v 101, line 7.

absolutely rigorous necessity. If that was so, it was no use talking about morality, at least not about the kind of morality in which choice was possible. You could praise people for being beautiful: they couldn't help that any more than they could help having blood in their veins. You could praise people for being generous: perhaps they couldn't help that either, if they were born that way. You could praise people for all kinds of qualities which they had in the way in which trees have qualities, in which animals have qualities; but if you are going to praise a man for an act of choice which he could have desisted from, for doing something which he needn't have done, then the very idea that a man needn't do something, that you can say to a man, 'You shouldn't have done that because you could have avoided it', the very notion of 'could have', is not applicable to a causally, rigidly determined nature, for Kant.

And that is why he says that 'in his voluntary acts' man 'is free and raised above natural necessity'.<sup>1</sup> Already Shaftesbury, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had said that man is not 'a Tyger strongly chain'd' or 'a Monkey under the Discipline of the Whip'; 'original *Native Liberty* [...] gives us the Privilege of ourselves, and makes us *our own*'.<sup>2</sup> But I don't think Shaftesbury developed this idea: he just said it as a self-evident truth, but didn't proceed to elaborate it in any particular fashion. But for Kant this was the heart and palladium of his entire system. Let me go on quoting from Kant. 'If', he says, 'our freedom is simply that of a projectile, which of course could think it was free from the propulsion by which it flies; if we were like a clock which, once wound up, could claim to run on its own motive power; then our freedom would simply be that of a mere turnspit.'<sup>3</sup>

Some people try to get out of this dilemma by saying, 'Well, all we need be afraid of is external causation, simply the acts upon us of some kind of dead inhuman nature, which try to condition us.' But we are not conditioned. We act in accordance with our

<sup>1</sup> **KRV** A466/B494.

<sup>2</sup> *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* ([London], 1711), ii 55, 252.

<sup>3</sup> A paraphrase of some of what Kant says at **KPV** 116–18; **KGS** v 95–7. See also *ibid.* 97, line 19.

character – our character is our own. If a man performs a good deed it's because he is a nice man. If a man performs a bad deed it's because he has a corrupt nature. He does it, certainly, because he chooses to do it; it is only his choice which is not free. His choice is conditioned by something – by his constitution, by his nature, by his character – but having chosen, of course, he can either do it or not do it.

For Kant this was not good enough. This is called the 'self-determinist' theory of freedom, which is, in fact, the most commonly accepted view, even among philosophers today. For Kant the notion that all man wanted to do was to feel free from some kind of cold, brutal external pressure upon him of forces of a cold and indifferent Nature, but provided you assured a man that he acted in character, provided you assured a man that his behaviour was predictable, but predictable from his own qualities, not the qualities of something else, he felt quite happy, quite reassured – Kant denied this with extreme ferocity. He said: To try to put on character what we have now removed from Nature, and try to save the notion of freedom in that way, is nothing but a 'miserable subterfuge'.<sup>1</sup> That was his phrase for this view.

If, in fact, this is so, if man is free, for Kant of course there is a dilemma: on the one hand there is the external world, to which also the human body belongs; but there is a dualism, there is something which is called 'soul', the spirit, the human will above all, which is in some sense free and soars above this and in some way erupts into the causal chain, erupts from outside and alters its direction. There is some kind of free-swinging activity here.

Exactly the same applies to his ethics. Why do we do what we do? It isn't the case, as previous thinkers have thought, that there are certain purposes which we can't help aspiring to; that there are certain goals which human beings are born to seek for and cannot help seeking for. There may be such goals, but if we can't help seeking for them, they aren't free. There are values which we wish to realise in our lives. These values, for Kant, are not stars in some

<sup>1</sup> 'Elender Behelf', **KPV**] 116; **KGS** 96, line 15.

external heaven, objective entities which a competent philosopher can discern and describe as he describes animal or mineral species. What happens is that a man determines himself, a man freely chooses or commits himself to choosing certain values. We choose, we are not chosen for. And the morality of the act consists in the act of commitment; so the notion of commitment, the notion that the whole value of a moral act consists in the fact that a man freely commits himself to pursue a certain kind of life, or to perform a certain kind of act, really begins its serious career under Kant.

It's not the value which the man chooses that makes the act moral; it's the choosing of it. Still less is it the consequence. The consequences we can't control; consequences we cannot tell about. Therefore what is the use of telling men to be utilitarians, when in fact it simply reduces them once again to being some kind of mechanical toys of nature herself? Nature may be ever so benevolent and ever so nice and ever so kindly, but if we are simply playthings in her hands, morality, for Kant, disappears. And he suffers an almost paranoiac fear of being locked up in a kind of terrible natural cage of rigorous determinist causation from which you can't shake yourself free, and this for him is falsification of human nature. This is the heart and centre of Kant's actual moral doctrine. He sometimes qualifies it; he tries to get out of the dilemma in various ways; but he always returns to this one central point.

Therefore for Kant men are value-choosers, and they are ends in themselves. What is meant by saying all men are ends in themselves, as he says? What it means is that if you are going to sacrifice a man to something, you must sacrifice him to something higher than himself – for example to the state, for example to God, for example to the progress of culture or the progress of history, or the progress of your race or your nation or your Church. But, says Kant, nothing is higher than man. It's no good saying that the nation or the state or even God is a value which is higher than that of man, because to be a value is to be chosen by man, the very act of valuation is what makes a value – you determine your values. If

you don't invent them or create them, at least it's the choosing of them, it's the adhering to them which makes acts valuable or valueless. If it is that, there is nothing higher to which men can be sacrificed, because they are the authors of values.

Therefore, to sacrifice a man to something which is not himself is to degrade him, exploit him, to commit a sin against the Holy Ghost; to do the most immoral thing you can possibly do. Hence this constant insistence on the fact that you mustn't use men as means to ends but only as ends in themselves – that's the meaning of that formula. You mustn't use men as means to ends, no matter how splendid, because they must choose them themselves. If they don't choose these ends themselves, they become playthings. If they become playthings, they are dehumanised, and that is a crime and a sin. And that is the heart, as I say, of Kant's moral doctrine. He didn't directly apply to politics; nevertheless, it of course did have its political implications.

The notion of nature therefore becomes, as you can see, no longer that of a model or something to follow, which it is for almost the entire eighteenth century; nature now becomes the stuff on which you wreak your will, it becomes a kind of indifferent stuff, a kind of slag-heap with which you do what you like. At worst, it's an enemy: it's an enemy because the more natural you are, the more animal you are. It's in a way the recrudescence in secular terms of the old Christian opposition between matter and grace, between nature and grace. Nature is what seeks always to kill you; nature is what wants to turn you into something causal; nature is your body; nature is all those forces which you can do very little about; nature is the inexorable, the inevitable, the determined. You, man, moral beings, the moral author, are not inexorable, not determined: you are free. And therefore nature is now conceived of at best as neutral stuff upon which you wreak your free will, at worst as an enemy seeking to enslave you.

And this is new. The idea of hostility to nature is something which the French could never have accepted, and would have regarded, I think, as a little insane. But certainly Kant sets this doctrine going – of the self versus nature, the self versus the world,

and not as part of that great world which the sciences can explain and which the sciences can give you authority over, giving power over. Hence the very idea of a science of man – be it anthropology, sociology, psychology, no matter what – is for Kant simply the science of the non-human parts of man: his nervous system, his emotions, his passions, all the things which Herder thought he shouldn't have isolated or divided from the rest of man. Certainly there can be a science of human passions, there can be a science of psychology, but this merely deals with the poor old empirical body. But there is something beyond this – there is the immortal soul. And of the immortal soul there cannot be a science, because it's free; if it's free, it obeys no laws, it obeys only the laws which you set for yourself. But laws which you set for yourself are not inevitable – you needn't set them for yourself. This he also derives from Rousseau.

And let me make an aside here. This is typical of the modern world. There is a great break, somewhere in the seventeenth century, from the view according to which validity, truth, is something which is resident out there: only those things are true for which you can claim that they exist in the external world, whether you want it so or not. That's what makes things true, that's what makes arguments valid. If there are laws out there created by nature or by God, that is the nature of things and that's what makes things true. In the seventeenth century, as a result of the rise of subjectivism, for various causes and reasons which I'm afraid I cannot discuss here, you get a reversal of this. Only those things are valid, only those things are true which you make for yourself; only those laws are real which you impose upon yourself. Laws are now no longer laws in the natural sense of simply generalisations about what happens in the world. Laws now are rules. Rules need authors: the author is myself. And therefore, from roughly the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, under the influence both of Descartes and of Grotius, you get the notion that if a man obeys laws made by some outside force, he is a slave; if he obeys laws made by himself, he is free. He is free because he can shake them off, he is free because they are of his own making.

Kant was rationalist enough, and enough of a child of the Enlightenment – and he was far more so than Herder in some ways – to believe that there was a faculty called reason, and therefore all men who ask themselves what is right and what is wrong, because they are rational, will arrive at the same conclusions. He didn't give very many clear tips about how to discover what in fact is rational, and it remains obscure in his works – it remains obscure in any case. The notion of what rational ends are is one of the obscurest problems of philosophy. Thirty years ago I thought I could understand it, but as a result of growing age I have become denser and denser on this subject, I have to tell you, and no longer quite understand what rational ends are. At least Kant thought he did, but he doesn't make it very clear what they are. At any rate, the point is that he did believe that all men are rational creatures, and what is right for one man will, if he thinks in correct ways, be equally right for another man. And therefore there need be no conflict: there will not be a situation in which something is right for me which is incompatible with something which is right for you. He thinks there is some kind of natural harmony or coincidence because reason is the same in all men. This is a concession which he does make to rationalism.

But this is not the part of Kant which affected subsequent thought. At least, it didn't affect it as strongly as the elements on which I am trying to concentrate. What really affected later thought was the notion that I must be my own author – autonomy – I am the author of my acts. Consequently, you get the notion that what you have to work for is not happiness, not efficiency, above all not a world in which a lot of Helvétian or Holbachian wiseacres, a lot of scientists or a lot of enlightened despots, manipulate the human herd, even for their own good, because this is a degrading spectacle. What you have to work for is human dignity and the humanity in man – human dignity, freedom, respect for other people; respect for other people as valuers, as choosers. They are choosers in exactly the same way in which you are a chooser, and you mustn't choose for them, you must let them choose for themselves, even if what they choose is wrong. As I say, he

profoundly believed that to choose wrongly is better than not to choose at all, because that is the essence of man.

I imagine that the worst possible kind of philosopher, from his point of view, would have been someone like Jeremy Bentham, who believed that all that was necessary was to create a society in which men were induced by self-interest to do things which in fact would make other people happy. Since they couldn't do it in the light of their own reason, or evidently haven't, you must create a society in which there are strong inducements for them to act in such a way as to make society harmonious, efficient and happy. This for Kant, as I say, is ultimate degradation of the whole of human nature, particularly when Bentham talks about human rights, which for Kant were absolutely sacred: human rights simply reside in the fact that they are free choosers – that is what is meant by saying they have rights, that they are human. Bentham said that rights are nonsense, and the idea of natural rights was 'nonsense upon stilts',<sup>1</sup> mere '*bawling upon paper*'.<sup>2</sup> He said this to the French revolutionaries, who made him an honorary citizen.

Kant was among the few philosophers of his day who approved of the French Revolution, not only of the early stages of it, which everyone was very pleased about, but even of the later stages, when the Terror began and when most respectable persons naturally were horrified and began to curse it. And he approved of it because he thought that for the first time a constitution was promulgated in which, at least in theory, every man was able to vote in accordance with his own moral will. The voters might be wrong, but at least it was recognised that they were not to be dominated by other men, no matter who, whether clerics or secular, whether enlightened tyrants or any other wise oligarchical men, but were

<sup>1</sup> 'Nonsense upon Stilts' (1796), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Rights, Representation, and Reform: Nonsense upon Stilts and Other Writings on the French Revolution*, ed. Philip Schofield, Catherine Pease-Watkin, and Cyprian Blamires (Oxford 2002), 330.

<sup>2</sup> 'Observations on the Draughts of Declarations-of-Rights Presented to the Committee of the Constitution of the National Assembly of France' (1789), *ibid.*, 187.

allowed to choose the form of government for themselves by a free act of voting. And this appeared to him to be a colossal triumph in favour of the moral dignity of men, and that is why he remained a friend of the French Revolution from the beginning to the end of his life.

It wasn't a very popular thing to do in Prussia, and Kant kept rather quiet about it. In fact, he received a veiled but nevertheless fairly firm warning from Frederick the Great's nephew, who succeeded him on the throne, that even though he was a quiet professor of logic at Königsberg, it didn't really do for him to propagate dangerous thoughts of this kind, and he piped down. But he didn't change his opinions, and his writings still betray this rather wistful admiration for these heroic figures in Paris, no matter how violent, how bloodstained, which is a rather remarkable fact about this very quiet man who was born in Königsberg, never left it, and is otherwise a model of a quiet, decent, respectable provincial professor.

Let me now say a few words about his disciple the dramatist Schiller, who I think also formed a link in the succession which I am trying to trace. Schiller is constantly talking about freedom, and he is talking about freedom in Kant's sense. He talks about the 'kingdom of freedom', 'the free principle in man', 'spiritual freedom', 'mankind whose sacred palladium is freedom', 'inner freedom', 'moral freedom', the 'free mind', 'an independent principle in us', 'holy freedom which is our true fatherland', 'demonic freedom', and uses all kinds of phrases of that sort.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> It would be somewhat obsessive, even for the present editor, to (attempt to) catalogue all the places where the phrases in Berlin's list appear in Schiller's writings. Instead, the original German phrases are provided in this note – to help with online searches, e.g. in *Sämtliche Werke* (Berliner Ausgabe), detailed below and available online from IntelLex Past Masters, unhelpfully titled *Gesammelte Werke* (Charlottesville, 2011) – together with references for phrases that Schiller uses only once or twice, and sample references for more frequent phrases. These references identify the work in which, and the page(s) of that work on which, the phrases originally occurred, and also cite the relevant page(s) in *Philosophische Schriften* (PS), vol. 8 of Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke* [*Complete Works*], ed. Hans-Günther Thalheim, Peter Fix and others (Berlin, 1980–2005) [SSW]. The

is absolutely intoxicated with the mere word ‘freedom’, which somehow means everything to him – above all, the power of resistance against the evil forces of nature. That’s what it really does mean. The thing which he opposes to freedom – the other side – is something called ‘the compulsion of nature’,<sup>1</sup> blind natural necessity, the forces of nature, like emotions or instincts, as well as

following abbreviations are used for Schiller’s individual works, listed here with details of their first publication:

BSH: ‘Briefe von Schiller an Herzog Friedrich Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg über ästhetische Erziehung’ [‘Letters from Schiller to Duke Frederick Christian of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg on Aesthetic Education’], ed. A. L. J. Michelsen, No. 1, 9 February 1793, *Deutsche Rundschau* [*German Review*] 7 No. 28 (May 1876); No. 5, 21 November 1793, *ibid.* 8 No. 11 (August 1876); No. 6, 3 December 1793, *ibid.*

UAEM: ‘Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reyhe von Briefen’ [‘On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters’], *Die Horen* [*The Horae*: daughters of Zeus and Themis, goddesses of order] 2 (1795) Nos 1, 2, 6; the letters in No. 6 (letters 17–27) have the collective title ‘Die schmelzende Schönheit’ [‘Melting Beauty’].

UAW: ‘Ueber Anmuth unde Würde’ [‘On Grace and Dignity’], *Neue Thalia* [*New Thalia*] 3 (1793) No. 2. Thalia was one of the Greek muses.

UE: ‘Ueber das Erhabene’ [‘On the Sublime’], *Kleinere prosaische Schriften* [*Minor Prose Writings*] iii (Leipzig, 1801).

VE: ‘Vom Erhabenen’ [‘Of the Sublime’], *Neue Thalia* 3 (1793) No. 3, 320–94; 4 (1794) No. 4, 52–73.

‘Kingdom of freedom’, ‘Reich der Freiheit’: **UE** 33; **PS** 582.

‘The free principle in man’, ‘das freie Prinzip in uns’: **VE** 367; **SSW** 248.

‘Spiritual freedom’, ‘die Freiheit des Geistes’: e.g. **VE** 361, 362; **PS** 245, 246.

‘Mankind whose sacred palladium is freedom’, ‘die Menschheit (deren heliges Palladium Freiheit ist)’: **UAW** 210; **SSW** 215.

‘Inner freedom’, ‘innere Freiheit’: **VE** 328; **UAEM**, letter 19, 59; **PS** 228, 368.

‘Moral freedom’, ‘moralische/sittliche Freiheit’: e.g. **BSH** No. 6, 262; **PS** 719.

‘Free mind’, ‘freier Geist’. **BSH** No. 1, 274; **PS** 674.

‘An independent principle in us’, ‘ein selbstständiges Prinzip in uns’: **UE** 14; **PS** 575.

‘Holy freedom which is our true fatherland’: untraced (‘Heilige Freiheit, die unser wahres Vaterland ist?’), but see **UE**, 35, 41; **SSW** 583, 585.

‘Demonic freedom’, ‘dämonische Freiheit’: **UE** 24; **BSH** No. 5, 256; **SSW** 579, 711.

<sup>1</sup> **UAEM**, letter 14, *Die Horen* 1 No. 2, 80; **SSW** 350.

physical forces. ‘It is not for man, as for other creatures, to reflect the rays of some other rational being,’ says Schiller, ‘not even those of the divine being himself: he must shine by his own light.’<sup>1</sup> And then something even more daring. ‘Not even the Almighty can end our autonomy, not even he determines our will against our principles’,<sup>2</sup> good or bad, virtuous or vicious. ‘All other things must; man is the being who wills.’<sup>3</sup> He is ‘subject to laws neither of nature nor of reason’.<sup>4</sup> Of course he ought to be reasonable if he can be, but he is not subject to the laws of reason. If he chooses not to be rational, so much the worse for him, but he can – that is the point.

Nature gets off very badly in Schiller. Nature, he says, ‘treads in the dust the creations of wisdom [...]. Significant and trivial, noble and base, she involves them all in the same hideous disaster. She preserves some world of ants, but man, her most glorious creature, she crushes in her giant’s arm, and often dissipates her most arduous achievements [...] in one frivolous hour.’<sup>5</sup> So much for nature, red in tooth and claw: it really begins then. And of course men seek servitude, they seek slavery, but they mustn’t be allowed it. You might say that men might be happier as slaves, perhaps they are content as slaves, they can be drugged into it, they can be hypnotised into it, it may be that men don’t want to lose their chains; but, echoing Rousseau, he says: If they love their chains, they must be shamed into throwing them off. They have no business to love their chains. Happiness is not enough: a man who grovels upon the ground, bound with chains, strewn with flowers, as Rousseau has it,<sup>6</sup> and says he is perfectly comfortable in them

<sup>1</sup> **UAW** 167; **SSW** 194.

<sup>2</sup> **VE** 342; **SSW** 236.

<sup>3</sup> **UE** 3; **SSW** 571.

<sup>4</sup> **UAEM**, letter 23, 85; **SSW** 384. Cf. **UAW** 195; **SSW** 208.

<sup>5</sup> **UE** 33; **SSW** 583. IB’s misleadingly loose version has been somewhat improved with wording from RR2 93.

<sup>6</sup> In his *Discours [sur les sciences et les arts]* [‘Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts’] (Geneva, 1750), 5–6, Rousseau wrote that the sciences and the arts ‘strew flowers over the chains which weigh [men] down’.

and doesn't in the least wish to be liberated, betrays his true nature. He has no business to be in chains; he must be liberated, no matter how much he struggles against it. This is the doctrine. Phaëthon, said Schiller, about the mythological son of Apollo, drove Apollo's horses wildly to his disaster,<sup>1</sup> but he drove them, he was not driven.

I may tell you it wasn't only Schiller who said these things. This became quite a prevalent mood towards the end of the eighteenth century. The poet Blake, who was a Swedenborgian, said something very similar to that. He also has a kind of superstitious fear of being in a scientific cage, of being caged in a hideous determinist causal universe in which he can't act as a free human being. When in the famous poem he says, 'A Robin Red breast in a Cage / Puts all Heaven in a Rage',<sup>2</sup> let me tell you that the cage of which he speaks is the cage of 'scientific rationalism, not a literal cage; and the villains of the piece are Newton and Locke'<sup>3</sup> – these are the people who have bound chains upon human beings and have prevented their freedom. Laws are needed to fence men off: 'And their children wept & built / Tombs in the desolate places, / And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them / The eternal laws of God.'<sup>4</sup> 'Art is the Tree of Life. [...] Science is the Tree of Death'<sup>5</sup> – you can't go much further than that.

This indicates that already towards the end of the eighteenth century there began this quite intelligible, if irrational, struggle against, indignation with, what was regarded as an over-tidy, spick and span universe in which human beings were like bricks in some noble edifice – mere bricks, unable to get out. Even Diderot, who was an Encyclopedist – after all, he was the editor of the

<sup>1</sup> In his poem 'Monument Moors des Räubers' ['Monument of Moor the Robber'], first published in his *Anthologie auf das Jahr 1782* ['Anthology for the Year 1782'] ([Stuttgart], 1781), Schiller tells the story of Phaëthon's demise (**SSW** i 122).

<sup>2</sup> 'Auguries of Innocence' (1803), lines 5–6: *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr (Oxford, 1978) (hereafter Bentley) ii 1312.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. TCE2 381.

<sup>4</sup> *The First Book of Urizen*, plate 28, lines 4–7: **Bentley** i 282.

<sup>5</sup> 'Laocoon' (1820?), aphorisms 16, 17, 19, **Bentley** i 665–6.

Encyclopedia and in a way an absolutely characteristic *philosophe* of the eighteenth century – speaks of the nearness of the great artist to the great criminal. He says they both break rules, they both are in love with splendour and with power, they both take dreadful risks, they defy conventions. Farouche and savage inside, the artist creates marvellous new, original, bold, upsetting art; and the criminal commits huge crimes. He doesn't approve of the criminal, but he thinks these are the people who move mankind, not the more conventional figures, who are merely talented, merely respectable. I don't think Diderot says this at all often – normally he takes a perfectly ordinary conventional Encyclopaedist line – but the mere fact that in the middle of the eighteenth century such things could be said is an indication that a kind of dark revolt against what might be called 'sheer rationalism', 'sheer Encyclopedism' – this whole edifice of a Newtonianised world in which morals and politics, our social lives and individual lives, will be regulated in accordance with the new laws of psychology and sociology, which will be discovered by scientists – is beginning to bloom.

Take Kant's view of punishment. It would be regarded as a highly reactionary view of punishment, but it's perfectly characteristic of him. Kant believes in retributive punishment, not corrective punishment, not punishment which is education, and not punishment which is merely preventive and merely protects the peaceful from the criminal. He believes in retribution because he thinks men are responsible for their acts, and if they are responsible, then they must be punished because they are responsible. If for example you take a man who is a criminal and you say: 'The poor creature couldn't help himself', 'He is not a thief, he is a kleptomaniac', 'He is not a murderer, he is a man who has been badly educated and this appeared to him a good thing to do, he didn't know any better, and therefore he ought to be sent to be cured, he ought to be sent to hospital' – which is a perfectly humane, modern view – for Kant this is an insult to him, to to the criminal. The criminal is a free being, and he would prefer to go to prison in order to pay the price of this, because he knew what he

was doing, instead of being regarded as a poor thing, inferior to the people who are sending him to a hospital. And this is a perfectly intelligible attitude. The one thing which he doesn't want – is to be regarded as a creature inferior to the scientists who judge him, to the doctors who send him. He'd rather be a free criminal who knows what price he is going to pay, and if necessary pays it, than a rather inferior creature who has to be pitied, who has to be well treated by people who are compassionate towards him because they are superior to him – they understand his motives, whereas he does not. They are the psychiatrists; he is the patient.

This, for Kant, is the ultimate insult to human nature, and it is for Schiller too. This is a perfectly intelligible attitude, and this is why Kant holds on rather strongly to what even in his day was a not particularly popular view of retributive punishment, because at least it recognises human responsibility to the fullest, and allows that a man knows what he is doing as opposed to not knowing it.

To go back to Schiller for a moment, let me give you an example of the kind of thing Schiller said, and you will see how this leads to the ultimate irrationalist assault. Schiller, of course, is a dramatist and is interested in the theory of the drama. And he is discussing the play the *Medea*:<sup>1</sup> I don't think it's actually Euripides' *Medea*, it's the *Medea* written in the seventeenth century; it's Corneille's *Medea*,

<sup>1</sup> Schiller did not write a sustained study of *Medea*; there are only a few scattered remarks about the play in the course of different discussions of the morality of theatre. In a 1784 lecture he writes, 'When morality is no longer taught, when religion no longer discovers faith, when law no longer exists, *Medea* will still look at us as she staggers down the palace stairs, and the infanticide has now occurred': 'Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?' ['What Can a Theatre of Good Standing Actually Achieve?'], *Rheinische Thalia* [*Rhenish Thalia*] (after the first issue, plain *Thalia*) No. 1 (Spring 1785), 10–11. At **VE** 4 No 4, 54, he conveys his admiration for *Medea*. Later in the same essay he writes: 'Medea, by murdering her children, aims at Jason's heart in this act, but at the same time she inflicts a painful stab in her own, and her revenge becomes aesthetically sublime as soon as we see the tender mother': *ibid.* 72. In 'Zerstreute Betrachtungen über verschiedene ästhetische Gegenstände' ['Scattered Reflections on Various Aesthetic Topics'] he observes that witnessing a crime can please us: *Medea*, *Clytemnestra*, *Orestes* 'fill our minds with a horrifying delight': *ibid.* 129. **PS** 89, 263, 272, 279.

in fact, he's talking about.<sup>1</sup> Everybody here, I'm sure, knows the story of Medea. Medea was the daughter of the king of Colchis. Jason arrives from Athens with the Argonauts, in pursuit of the Golden Fleece; he falls in love with Medea; he abducts her by her own wish; he marries her, and sails off with the Golden Fleece. Then, being an ordinary Thracian or Athenian, it's not quite certain which,<sup>2</sup> he abandons her for another woman. Medea is indignant, enraged in fact, and proceeds to murder the children whom she bore for Jason; in some stories she merely strangles them, in other stories she boils them alive. Schiller doesn't approve of the act of boiling alive. He doesn't say that it was a particularly good thing to have done. That he does not say. But he says there would have been no tragedy if Medea were not a heroine, and she is a heroine because she rises above nature. By nature she is a mother, by nature she has a maternal instinct, by nature she ought to love her children and be incapable of this act. And nature is what would compel an ordinary woman not to do this, but she rises above nature, in a monstrous way, no doubt – in a savage, monstrous and sinister way. She resists natural impulse and dominates her own nature to such a degree that she actually puts her children to death, which is an unnatural and contra-natural fact. And this makes Medea a very sizeable figure, and that's what makes her a tragic heroine. If she didn't do that, if she simply obeyed her impulses, there would be nothing interesting about her.

Compare her, he says,<sup>3</sup> to Jason, who is a perfectly nice man, doesn't kill anybody at all, just an ordinary, no doubt, middle-class Athenian,<sup>4</sup> an ordinary bourgeois Athenian floating down the ordinary river of life, who obeys ordinary conventions – just keeps a mistress: this is not unknown – a perfectly ordinary man of no size at all. And he therefore doesn't in any sense form a tragic hero;

<sup>1</sup> What is the evidence for this? In the last passage cited in the previous note Schiller refers to 'Medea of the Greek tragedy', and he never refers to Corneille's play.

<sup>2</sup> He was the son of Aeson, King of Iolcos in Thessaly.

<sup>3</sup> Apparently not: IB credits Schiller with his own comparison.

<sup>4</sup> See note 2 above.

whereas Medea – the whole tragedy is there because Medea is superhuman, because she is of monstrous size, and anybody who can resist nature in that way is fully human, even though she uses her freedom in a very abominable and wicked way. But she at least is a proof of the existence of freedom: that's what Medea means to him.

Exactly the same thing happens in a play called *The Robbers – Die Räuber* – where Karl Moor, who has been wounded by society, proceeds to become a criminal, and performs various crimes, against his own wife indeed, and against various other persons, until in the end he hands himself over to the police. But the whole notion of tragedy is that it's due to some sort of mistake. If you understood the nature of reality you wouldn't need to act in this way. If Oedipus had known that Laius was his father, he wouldn't have killed him and all would have been well. If Antigone had understood what was what, she would have acted in some manner which wouldn't have involved her in the fate in which she was involved. Therefore ultimately it's ignorance – maybe the gods send this ignorance on you, maybe you can't help it, in which case it's very sad – but omniscient beings couldn't possibly be involved in tragedy. They would be harmonious, they would be happy – all tragedy is due to some kind of misunderstanding of what's what, of what nature is like, of what means lead to what ends, of what truly makes people happy and what doesn't.

This is no longer true for someone like Schiller. In the case of Medea, in the case of Karl Moor, values have clashed. Society is no doubt evil and needn't be, but Karl Moor is a heroic, demonic figure in whom violent ends struggle: he can't quite make up his mind between them, but he's perfectly free to choose. And whichever ends he chooses, whether he chooses to obey the law or whether he chooses to defy it, something terrible will happen. If he chooses to obey the law, he will kill the impulse to freedom inside him; if he chooses to disobey it, he will make a lot of people miserable and commit various crimes. There is no solution to Karl Moor's problem, because not all values are compatible. This is the first moment at which a break appears in the third proposition, the

third leg of the tripod which I spoke about in my first lecture, namely, that all true answers to problems of behaviour must be compatible with each other and form a kind of jigsaw puzzle. But if man is free, and free to do evil as well as good, and if man has more than one choice, perhaps three or four alternatives, three or four possibilities on which he can embark, and if some of these possibilities are not compatible with possibilities chosen by others, then tragedy is built into the very nature of reality. Anything, however, is better than being a mere cog in some kind of machine. That is the one thing which is not permissible.

The enemies are of course, as I say, Newton and Locke. And Schiller asks: What is tragedy? Laocoön knows that if he tells the truth to the Trojans about the Greeks the snakes, the dragons, will strangle him; and he does tell the truth, but he needn't have done. He chooses to do it because he defies what he knows to be his fate, and the fact that these snakes strangle him is evil. He couldn't have escaped it – nothing which Laocoön could have done could have made him happy – and he chooses heroically. Regulus, who hands himself over to the Carthaginians because he promised to go back, performs a heroic act which he knows is going to end in the most ghastly disaster for him, and he cannot avoid it, do what he might. Satan, in Milton's poem, has seen all the horrors of Hell; nevertheless he goes on with his evil practices. And although this may be monstrous, it's heroic, it's dynamic, it's in some way free. Whereas Iago and Richard III in Shakespeare are not tragic figures; they are simply human beings entirely determined by passions. Passions are parts of nature, and therefore we watch them simply like animals. They are clever animals who are trying to gain their ends in the way in which cats or dogs or tigers might, and therefore they don't stir pity, and they don't stir horror; they are simply creatures of their own passions, not free, and therefore contemptible. And therefore there is a difference between resisting nature and following her, whether what you do is good or what you do is evil. To be driven by passion is certainly a form of heteronomy, what later came to be called alienation. The enemy is

always coercion, whether it's coercion by nature on the one hand, or whether it's coercion by the state on the other.

This, I think, is the Kantian heritage in Schiller, this perpetual harping on freedom, even if freedom takes demonic or monstrous forms. And later, of course, you will find it among the heroes of the German Romantics, among the Byronic individuals who dominate their environment, even though they dominate it in a very sinister and hideous fashion. And this really derives – that is the proposition I wish to reiterate – from Kant's insistence – his obstinate, constant refrain – upon the fact that the most important thing about man is his will; not his reason, his will, because that alone is what frees him from nature and makes him into a creature who can determine his own fate. A man whose will is broken is no man. A man may be irrational, he is still a man; but a man whose will is broken has ceased to be a man. And so we have this highly rigorous, quiet, rational, above all scientifically inclined, logically coherent thinker, who, perhaps because of his extreme obsession with trying to escape from what he regards as the prison of determinism, because of his grappling with the problem of free will, invents the notion of the free ego, of the free self.

In my next lecture I propose to tell you about how Fichte, who was a kind of treacherous disciple of Kant – that is to say, a man who claimed to be a disciple of Kant, but whom Kant regarded with absolute horror – how Fichte developed this idea, partly out of Kant, partly out of Herder, partly out of Schiller himself, into a vast moral and political doctrine which thereafter proceeded to dominate both German and non-German thought, and created a great many of the movements, as I say, by which our own time is dominated. Fichte is really, if you like to call him so, the villain of this particular piece, and it is really he who socialises, politicises, publicises this whole thing. And the career of Fichte, who begins as an extreme Romantic individualist and ends as a man who sings immense paeans to the power of the powerful, organic, all-embracing state and all-embracing nation – the career of man who begins with his country's beginnings and ends with something which resembles some of the most intoxicating and sinister

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doctrines of the twentieth century – is, I think, a story which I at any rate regard as worth telling.

Thank you very much.

### 3 Fichte and Romantic Self-Assertion

[*music plays for 15 seconds*]

DONALD TREADGOLD<sup>1</sup> Ladies and gentlemen, this evening we shall hear the third and last of the lectures being given under the general title 'The Assault on the French Enlightenment' by this season's John Danz Lecturer, Sir Isaiah Berlin. Last night, Professor Pease explained in some detail the John Danz bequest, its background and purposes, to which we are all indebted for these lectures among the others that many of you have attended. On Monday night, Dr Katz recounted for us some major aspects of Sir Isaiah's academic background, and therefore, trading on the privilege of having known the speaker a bit, for something like twenty-five years, I should like to add a word or two, if I might, about some of his other qualities.

For one thing, he has served his country with distinction. During World War II he was with the British Ministry of Information in New York, and later the British Embassy in Washington. It is said that, during these years, he was the sort of person who could, on request of superiors to look into, let us say, conditions in Jamaica, proceed in a manner somewhat as follows. He would gather up all available reports, voluminous in character, about Jamaica. He would read them through in record time, lay them aside, contemplate the ceiling, smoke his pipe furiously, and then go to his superior, and would say, this is how things are in Jamaica. These are the problems, these are the trouble spots, these are the issues that require attention, and, as subsequent events would prove, he would invariably be right.

According to oral tradition, these traits earned him such a reputation that Mr Winston Churchill expressed a wish to meet him and asked that he be invited to dine. At a time before our speaker was knighted, a certain Mr I. Berlin appeared for dinner with Mr Churchill; during dinner, chatted amiably; after dinner, returned to the drawing room, where Mr Berlin sat down at the piano and asked Mr Churchill, 'What would you like me to play?' In defense of Churchill's staff, it must be said that the entry for Mr Irving Berlin immediately precedes the entry for Mr Isaiah Berlin in *Who's Who*, and it could happen to anyone, especially anyone whose head is not quite screwed all the way on. It often does.

Sir Isaiah also possesses considerable administrative talents. He has been one of the directors of Covent Garden's Royal Opera House, a governor of the University of Jerusalem. He is presently president of Wolfson College in Oxford, which is far from being only an ornamental title. Like the very few other truly

<sup>1</sup> Donald Warren Treadgold (1922–94), professor of Russian history in the History Department and the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington.

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great men I've been privileged to know, he takes an active and at the same time discriminating interest in his students. Indeed, one may hazard a guess that it is his extraordinary sensitivity to what all sorts of other people are like that accounts for a part of his unparalleled success in studying the history of philosophy and intellectual history, which must in part comprise the history of philosophers and of intellectuals, as well as the history of philosophical and other ideas. He is the best living demonstration I know of the fact that the life of the mind can be fun, provided, of course, that one is able to bring to it a rigorous and many-sided education, a high degree of perception, a quick and precise kind of intellect, a wide-ranging experience of the world, and, it might not be amiss to add, a not inconsiderable amount of energy. He has so much of all of these qualities that one is sometimes tempted to urge him to divide them up a little to share the wealth with the rest of us.

To you as the momentary beneficiary of them, I am honored to introduce Sir Isaiah Berlin, speaking on the subject 'Fichte and Romantic Self-Assertion'.

ISAIAH BERLIN Ladies and gentlemen, and in particular Professor Treadgold, I should like to say that of course I'm most grateful for this very, very kind introduction. There are only two things I wish to say about that. The first is that it's evidence far more of Professor Treadgold's sweetness of character, generosity and imagination than it is of any alleged qualities of mine. These qualities I've always known in him. In fact, if he's not careful, I might launch an equally warm-hearted encomium of *him*. I think time alone will prevent me from doing that – and your patience. The other thing is: As a for the famous story about the world-famous composer and myself, there are a great many versions of it, all true. As Herder said, myth and legend are just as enriching to life as excessive scruple and an over-pedantic attitude towards actual facts.

I MUST NOW talk about a very different figure, namely Fichte, who was neither, like Herder, a man of very generous character, nor, like Kant, a man totally dedicated to the truth. Nevertheless, his influence in some respects was perhaps wider than that of either.

Perhaps I ought to have said last time that Schiller's classification of mankind, at least of the history of mankind, into three stages<sup>1</sup> is what affected the imagination of his contemporaries. He discriminated three stages. First what he called the savage<sup>2</sup> stage,

<sup>1</sup> The three stages are 'physischer', 'ästhetischer' and 'moralischer' ('physical', 'aesthetic' and 'moral'): **UAEM**, letter 24, 86; SSW 384.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller refers to man's 'savage life' ('wilde Leben') in the first stage: *ibid*.

when men are simply victims of impulses, and a kind of Hobbesian universe prevails, in which men, acted upon by their passions, fight each other and in general try to live with each other in a condition of considerable savagery and chaos, until finally order is restored by the stronger and more unscrupulous among them.

The second stage is the development of rational ideas, in which certain persons are set up in authority over others and certain intellectual ideals develop. He called this stage, in which men begin believing in principles, and begin behaving in accordance with strict principles, indeed to an almost idolatrous extent – he called this stage not the stage of savagery, but the stage of barbarism, because any total subjection to principles without any criticism, any total submission to principles for their own sakes – and I am afraid this is a kind of side-swipe at his great teacher Kant – he regarded as a form of idolatry, and this is the kind of thing which only barbarians do.

The third stage is the stage of free men. Free men are men who live open lives and follow some kind of ideal which is subject to constant criticism, constant revision, constant change. And, of course, when asked how this was compatible with any kind of civil administration – if every man followed his own free ideal, might there not be certain collisions? – he escaped this criticism by saying that of course he was not talking about the empirical world. In the empirical world men were parts of this hideous causal treadmill which they couldn't avoid; after all, they had bodies, these bodies obeyed certain physiological and physical laws, and these couldn't be altered by any amount of pursuit of liberty. But they must rise above this, and in their minds they must live pure, dedicated and free lives. And in particular he illustrated this by saying that the salvation of men from oppression and enslavement by material factors was to be attained through what he called 'play'. And play he identified with art. I don't wish to enlarge too much upon this conception – it would take up too much time – but a summary of it is that in art alone you are completely free, because there you impose laws upon yourself. We go back to Rousseau again. Schiller doesn't give this example, but if you are, say, a boy playing at being

a red Indian, you *are* a red Indian for these purposes, and the rules which you obey are the rules which you have invented for the purpose of the game. Everything which you do obeys your own creative fantasy and imagination, and not some rigorous yoke derived from the external world which bends you to its inexorable necessity.

Art for Schiller is a form of free self-expression. But it doesn't have very much to do with actual political or social life. What he really thought was that in the rather gloomy world of the minor German principalities, in the even, to him, in some ways gloomier world of the Jacobin Terror in France, the only way for a free man to escape is to dedicate himself to purely spiritual activity and try to ignore as far as possible the grim necessities of actual life. This form of escapism didn't really commend itself to people who actually were faced with acute and concrete problems of life, but it certainly had a profound effect upon artistic and aesthetic thought, both in Germany and in other countries.

Let me say one more thing before I come to Fichte himself, and that is this. If you ask: At what stage, exactly, do you get this notion of the tragic hero, that is to say, do you get this notion of a man oppressed by the necessities of empirical existence, who escapes them by rising above them, ignoring them, or at any rate fighting against them, whichever way out he takes – whether he takes what is called the barbarian way out, which is to try to struggle against them unsuccessfully, and go under in some fearful heroic duel, which is what, presumably, Karl Moor and others do in the play, or whether it is a question of rising into some artistic empyrean and trying to detach yourself from the world and live in the pure world of art and imagination and thought, like the Olympian gods, as Schiller says<sup>1</sup> – if you ask at what particular point this notion emerged, it has to be placed, it seems to me, between 1768 and 1783.<sup>2</sup> I will tell you why.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in 'Tragödie und Komödie' ['Tragedy and Comedy'], **PS** 303.

<sup>2</sup> 1783 is the year in which *Fiesco* (see below) was published.

In 1768 a play was written by Lessing. It was called *Minna von Barnhelm*, which those who study German literature will know well. In this play, which I won't describe to you – it's not a particularly good play – the hero is a Prussian officer who has been unjustly disgraced. He has been accused of committing some disgraceful act of which he is perfectly innocent. He is a man of honour, he doesn't know how to clear himself, he is in love with a noble lady called Minna von Barnhelm, he can't meet her because he thinks that she must think that he has committed this awful crime. And therefore he sits in an inn, refuses to see her, refuses to see anybody, gradually gets into debt, refuses the help of his servant, and in general behaves in a highly proud, unapproachable, somewhat neurotic fashion. Minna von Barnhelm turns out to be an extremely sensible young woman, who grasps the situation, takes various steps in order to clear his name, and finally manages to produce a situation in which his name is cleared, he rejoins her, and they live happily for ever after.

The point about Tellheim, the officer, is that he is not really a hero – the play is a comedy. This pride, this honour, this inability to face people, this absolutely impossible character which prevents people who try to help him from succeeding in helping him is regarded by Lessing with a certain amount of irony. And the sensible Minna and her sensible friends, who ultimately return him to good sense and to reason – good, sensible people who understand the true world and how it goes, and manage to wean this rather proud, impossible man back into the paths of normal existence – they are the true heroes of the play.

The same thing you will find, for example, in Molière's play *Le Misanthrope*, where the *misanthrope* also rejects the world because it's a corrupt and monstrous place, he wishes to have nothing to do with it, he complains about it all the time, and gradually is weaned back to some kind of sanity by a much more amiable, better balanced, more sensible and altogether more intelligent friend, who gradually explains to him the way of the world and the fact that one mustn't resist it in this rather foolish and rather impossible fashion.

These misanthropic characters who are wounded by the world and will not have it, and try to leave it, or at any rate battle against it – they become heroic in the forms of Karl Moor or Fiesco in Schiller in the 1780s. That is the moment at which this change occurs, at which the notion of harmony, good sense, science, reason is to some extent abandoned and a crown is placed upon the heads of passionate, dedicated, heroic characters who will not accept the world at its own valuation, who reject everything which is cheap and vile in it, who will not have anything to do with the dross which it contains, and assert themselves, however tragically, however unsuccessfully, however pessimistically, usually ending in some kind of fearful disaster, against common sense, convention and so forth. Between 1768 and 1783.

This kind of mentality began to prevail among German young men in the 1790s: this is what grew to maturity in those years. And Fichte was extremely characteristic of his time and his place. Like the other persons I have discussed – like Herder, like Kant – he was a man of humble birth, but, unlike them, he was a man of peculiarly resentful nature whom, rather like the hero of one of these tragedies, it was almost impossible to help. Anyone who tried to do anything for him was invariably cursed and slandered afterwards. In part, I think, his whole resistance to the French Enlightenment was stimulated by the kind of conception he had of France or Paris, by comparison of his own humble birth, and the inferiority complex to which it led, and his provincial origins and his poverty, against these rich, complacent, bewigged figures, who could talk about human happiness and human wisdom from the comfort of their wealth and their power; so that there was an element of personal resentment or personal feeling, which I dare say was shared by a good many provincial Germans when they contemplated this rich, but to them unapproachable, world of grandeur and fashion in the Paris of that time.

Fichte became a pupil of Kant's. That is to say, he went to his lectures in Königsberg, and improved upon them, or improved on them in his own mind. Kant himself did not think it an improvement, as you will presently hear. What really fascinated

Fichte, and fascinated his contemporaries, was Kant's central notion, namely that the world as understood by men was as it was because of the forms imposed upon it by the human mind; that these forms were not so much discovered as imposed upon it; that man found in the world that which he had imposed upon it, not consciously, not deliberately, but in some unconscious state, in some pre-imaginative state which Kant doesn't really describe very clearly, where man categorises the world, arranges certain categories in it, which afterwards are rigid and unaltering simply because his mind has already imposed them and the world is already cut into segments by them before man ever comes to consciousness of it.<sup>1</sup>

Fichte, however, went rather further in this direction. Kant's self performs its work in darkness. We have to deduce that this must have happened. Nobody is aware of this – it is not that you stand over the world and do something consciously to it. The spectacles through which you see the world are born with you; they are not placed upon your nose by yourself at some conscious moment of your existence. Fichte pushed this forward by two powerful arguments, which in their way deserve respect. The first is this. He says – and his views emerge from his theory of knowledge – that philosophers assert various things, and men in general assert up various things to be true. When you ask why a particular statement is true, whatever it might be – whether it's scientific or commonsensical – the normal thing is to ask for the

<sup>1</sup> What this condensed summary of 'Kant's central notion' (no doubt inadvertently) does not make fully explicit is that the forms or categories or segments imposed on the world by the human mind are derived from the structural predispositions of the human mind as well as from the nature of the world in itself. We can experience only what we are built to experience. Nevertheless, the formative properties of the human mind themselves emerge from the nature of the world in which the mind operates and is formed. The human mind is itself part of the world, and subject to evolutionary development like any other natural phenomenon. The relation between mind and world is a two-way street, like that between chicken and egg, and perhaps neither party can claim precedence. This tentative expansion of IB's account of course includes Darwinian insights available neither to Kant nor to Fichte.

ground of such a statement, and you try to give what ground you can in order to show that what you are saying is valid or true. But this ground is subject to further criticism of the same sort, and you say: What is the ground for the ground? And what is the ground of the ground of the ground? And this can go on indefinitely.

How is this to be solved? Why is there not a vicious regress here? Why should not people constantly ask for the because of the because of the because, or the why of the why of the why? And Fichte says that what actually happens is not this at all: this is a false view of human knowledge. This is a view which is inherited from Locke, by which we are a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which the external world makes certain impressions, which we afterwards discover in ourselves. But this isn't what happens. We are born with certain questing desires, we are born with certain purposes; delete that this is what men as men are, that is how they differ, he thinks, both from plants and from beasts, who really are objects upon which nature makes a certain impression, who simply behave or respond in some mechanical fashion. Men seek for something; even the human child seeks for something; and the world presents itself to this child in terms of the question which it asks of it. A table is not an object which I simply describe as a four-legged thing or a three-legged thing standing in front of me; a table is something which I use for the purpose of putting books on it or putting food on it. That's what a table is. It is I who make the table a table. Grass is green because I am at that moment engaged in discriminating colours. In other words, Fichte is one of the earliest authors of the whole theory of intentionality, as it is now called, by which, fundamentally, the world is an answer to certain unspoken questions on the part of its investigators.

This is the kind of thing which now, in aesthetics for example, Professor Gombrich has made popular, and various philosophers of science have discussed; that is to say, the fact that men don't simply describe what they see before them in some impartial, objective fashion, but always have a certain framework, already have a certain attitude towards it, – if you like, a certain theory about it. This is too grand a word, perhaps, for the undeveloped

human being; but at any rate they have certain hypotheses about it – they need something, they ask something of it. Every object which a man describes is something which, to use pragmatic language, he wants to use for something, or is afraid of, or is attracted to; or it's either an obstacle in his life, or on the contrary something which he wants to avail himself of – a tree is something which may yield fruit; a tree is something which he may knock against. In other words, every object has to be defined in terms of the actual purposive behaviour of human beings, which can be translated as answers to unformulated questions.

If this is so, says Fichte – and he believes this, and it is an insight of some brilliance – if this is so, then what really happens is that we cut this chain of the why of the why of the why, the ground of the ground of the ground, by an act of will. The world is that which we will it to be. My world is that which, whether I know it or not, corresponds to what I want it to be; or rather it may not correspond to it, but at any rate it answers, badly or well, to something which I want of it or ask of it or demand of it. And this demand, this asking, this thrusting forward activity, is what he calls the will.

This he derives from Kant, only he rather alters it, he perverts it, he makes of it a very deliberate affair, even in matters of knowledge, where Kant didn't use this concept of will at all. This distressed Kant very much, particularly when Fichte's first publication on this subject, since this was published anonymously, was assumed by people to be a new, brilliant work by Kant.<sup>1</sup> Kant was extremely distressed and did everything possible to disown this appalling thing, which appeared to him to remove the basis from his own work and to be a piece of absurd and imaginative fantastic exaggeration and distortion of his own much more orthodox views.

<sup>1</sup> *Versuch einer Critik aller Offenbarung* [*Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*] (Königsberg, 1792).



At any rate, that was Fichte's beginning. The second aspect of this, and it really is a kind of aspect of it, is the notion not only that the world is an act of will—the world is what we will it to be. (And he says quite explicitly that the world of one kind of creature is different from the world of another kind of creature. It's rather like Wittgenstein's famous remark that the world of the happy is different from the world of the unhappy.<sup>1</sup> Fichte says, in effect,

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung' [Logical-Philosophical

that the world of poets is different, let us say, from the world of bankers. There are certain things, obviously, which are common to them, but what they want of their world is so different that things must appear to them in different relationships. Colours, tastes, objects appear in different relationships in accordance with the temperamental demands which half-consciously men make upon it when they first enter upon it, even in their childhood.) The second aspect of this very thing is Fichte's concept of *Anstoß*, or impact. He says, if you read Kant, you might think that man begins, anyhow, by being a purely cognitive animal: all you do is contemplate. You contemplate the world and then you do your best: you describe it, you find various things in it, you ask about various relationships in it. Descartes asserts them, Hume denies them, Kant tries to patch the thing up, and so on. Fichte says: If we were pure contemplators, particularly if we were successful contemplators, we wouldn't be aware of ourselves at all. Anybody who is totally absorbed and successfully absorbed in contemplation of anything – in listening to music or watching a sea, or anything of the sort – if you are completely absorbed in it, you don't feel yourself at all. All that exists before you is the datum, in which you are completely sunk and absorbed. What makes you feel yourself as yourself, what first gives you your notion of a self at all, is of course resistance on the part of this external object – frustration, not substance but obstance, although Fichte did not use this particular term: some kind of resistance. It's then, it's when you want something and can't get it, it's when you want this particular pear, but it's too high above your grasp, it's if some animal comes and does you harm that you become aware of the difference between yourself and it, yourself and a tree, your desire and its frustration. And therefore it's the collision of a subject with something outside which makes the subject first aware of itself as something seeking, something questing, something which is to be distinguished from the not-self – the not-self being simply the

Treatise'], in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* [*Annals of Natural Philosophy*], 14 Nos 3–4 (December 1921), 6.43, 261.

theatre of its volitional activities, of its thrusting forward, and the fearful frustrations and bruises which it occasionally gets in the course of this.

This, therefore, is Fichte's notion of the self. The self becomes aware of itself in action, and in the beginning is action, and not contemplation. This is the absolute foundation of Fichte's thought, and a great deal emerged from that. In the beginning was the act, 'Im Beginn war die Tat',<sup>1</sup> as Goethe afterwards put in his *Faust*, which is a direct Fichtean sentiment. In the beginning was not knowledge, not *logos*, not understanding, but a thrusting forward, a demand, an attempt to squeeze the universe, to adapt it to your needs, whatever they might be. And Kant was aghast by this: it wasn't at all his kind of notion.

The way in which Fichte puts this is by saying that consciousness of the real world is derived from action, not the other way about. 'We do not act because we know; we know because we are called upon to act.'<sup>2</sup> This is in effect what I've been trying to say. We know because we are called upon to act, we can't help acting, and we derive knowledge from whether our act succeeds or not.

Supposing you find a solipsist, he says, who pretends that he is not sure whether you exist or not, someone who is not quite sure whether the world exists or not, one of these pseudo-doubters, as he thinks them, people who express doubts which no sane person could really feel – but, of course, some people do sometimes get into that state of mind. They are not quite sure whether the real world exists, perhaps it's all an illusion. He says: If you meet a man like that, it's quite simple what you must do. You must treat him as if he was a piece of rude matter, he says: strike him, insult him, do something awful to him; you will find that he will be very

<sup>1</sup> A misremembering of 'im Anfang war die That': Goethe, *Faust: eine Tragödie* (Tübingen, 1808), part 1, 81 ('That' is an archaic spelling of 'Tat').

<sup>2</sup> All references are to *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke* [*Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Complete Works*], ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin, 1845–6) (SW), by volume and page, thus: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* [*The Vocation of Man*] (1800; VM), book 3, 'Glaube' ['Faith'], SW ii 263.

indignant with you. He will not be indignant with his own creation, he will not be indignant with his own illusions, he will be indignant with you. He will become perfectly aware of the difference between you and him. He will no longer doubt that you are not he, and that the world contains at any rate two agents, and not one. This is the way to reason with doubters who aren't really doubting, but merely pretend to do so. Do something which he will not be able to avoid. If you succeed in irritating him and annoying him, you will find that you have taught him something. This is very much how the world appears to a child – the frustrating world, the world which doesn't answer expectations. If you find a grown-up child pretending to be a solipsist, behave as cruel nature behaves to children.

The great move which Fichte made – and this is really absolutely the heart of Romanticism, which I should like to emphasise with all the stress that I have in my possession – the real point is that Fichte said we are creators, we are essentially creators in the Schiller sense of the word. 'I do not exist for nature; she exists for me.'<sup>1</sup> This is a flat denial of the Enlightenment – of Locke, of Helvétius, of Holbach, of all these persons in the eighteenth century. There isn't something called nature which I carefully study, which I carefully describe, which I must find out the workings of, which I must find out the structure of. Nature exists for me because I am constituted as I am, or whatever I may turn out to be: that he won't tell you at the moment. However I may be, nature exists for me and not I for her. Nature is what I take her to be – she is the field of focus of my volitional activities.

And he says: 'I am not determined by the end' – say a value, passion for the truth or whatever it is, or passion for life or passion for beauty or passion for happiness, or whatever ends people have set before themselves – 'I am not determined by the end, the end is determined by me.'<sup>2</sup> Kant never said that: he never actually said

<sup>1</sup> VM: SW ii 318.

<sup>2</sup> SW ii 264–5. More literally, 'The end does not determine the content of the command, but conversely, the immediate content of the command determines the end.'

that I create ends out of nothing. There is a rational activity which tells me what the categorical imperative is, and tells not only me, but every other rational being who chooses to use rational methods for asking himself ‘What is my duty and what are my proper rational ends?’ Fichte has overstepped this limit; he has cut man loose from the only cord which held him to the old rational world, which Kant preserved most carefully. I determine my own ends, my ends don’t determine me – I invent them, I create them.

Let me tell you, this is quite a moment in the history of thought. It is a moment because until then the idea was that ends or goals, say of art or of life or of morality, were discoverable. How you discover them, as I tried to tell you in my first lecture, you could argue about for a long time: whether you discover them empirically or metaphysically or theologically, by intuition, by revelation, by whatever means, they are there, and what you think about them makes no difference to them. The important thing is to get it right, and that is why you admire the sages who in your opinion have got it right, and therefore live their lives successfully in the light of their discovery.

Fichte is the first thinker who explicitly says: ends are not discoverable, they are invented; they are not found, they are made. If ends are made, a great deal follows. If ends are made, they are no longer propositions, they are no longer answers to questions in the sense in which the discoveries of physics and the discoveries of chemistry, in which Fichte took no interest whatever, could be regarded as that. If ends are actually created or invented or made, then the question of whether all true answers are compatible with each other doesn’t arise, because these things aren’t answers, they are forms of action. I determine myself in a certain direction, I simply set before myself the end: I will paint this picture, I will create this piece of music. You can’t say: Is this piece of music compatible with that painting? It doesn’t make sense: pieces of music aren’t propositions, they aren’t true or false, they are creations. If I create things, the whole problem of truth and falsehood drops away. The model is, in fact, aesthetic. This is the

crucial centre, I think, of the whole irrationalist or Romantic or self-expressive movement.

Broadly speaking, and I don't wish to enlarge on this either, the history certainly of political and social thought, and I dare say of all thought of a large kind, is a succession of illuminating models. For Plato, perhaps, the chief model was geometry or something of that kind – at any rate, mathematical – and he thought that if you could understand the world, if you attained to the idea of the good and saw from that great height what the necessary connections are which hold the world together as a harmonious whole, you would then understand yourself in it. For Aristotle the model was more biological than it was mathematical. Many models followed. *The Social Contract* was a legal model, which illuminated, for the people of the time who conceived it, some kinds of relationships in society which were not illuminated by conceiving of society as a geometrical construction. There were organic models – people thought that the world was an organic whole. And there were mechanical models – people thought of it, as Diderot once said, as a kind of factory, or at any rate as a machine.

Each of these models always illuminated people, told them something which they perhaps hadn't thought of before, put the world in a different light, illuminated certain things, so that they felt that, now that they used this model, they understood something which had previously had been obscure. But of course, in liberating them in that way, it also obscured what the earlier model had revealed; and in the end this model, as always happens with models, proves constricting, proves inadequate, proves a kind of straitjacket, and a new model arises.

The eighteenth-century model was certainly a mechanistic model of sorts: sometimes biological, sometimes even more mechanistic, but that was the analogy in terms of which people tried to explain to themselves the structure of society, the structure of human relationships, the relation of body to mind, and the rest of it. The model which is now used by Fichte is an aesthetic model, that is to say, a model which is taken from creation. The world is what we invent; life is something which, if we are conscious and if

we are fully developed, we create out of nothing, we invent ourselves. We proceed forward, and we make our lives as we choose, within the limits of empirical possibility – and he doesn't mind about empirical possibility; he thinks empirical possibility confines us, but he proposes to ignore that. Within these limits it's possible to construct spiritual entities, which is all that means anything to him – art, religion, philosophy, moral attitudes, social attitudes, political attitudes.

The Russian revolutionary Herzen, writing in the nineteenth century, put this with extreme vividness when he said: Where is the song before it's sung? Where is the dance before it's danced?<sup>1</sup> And the answer to this was: Nowhere – obviously. But this was not so for the eighteenth century. As I tried to tell you in my first lecture, for Sir Joshua Reynolds *was* a Platonic model there, to which the painter was trying to penetrate through the curtain of mere empirical experience. For earlier thinkers there really were ideals of beauty, ideals of moral rightness or goodness, ideals of how life should be lived, which clever, gifted or perhaps God-instructed, intuitive persons could discover. And the discovery was a real discovery: you discovered the truth. Not so if you produce the new analogy with a new Herderian art, which is simply creation, invention. Where is the folk song before the anonymous creators of the folk song invented it? It isn't anywhere, it doesn't lie there in the heavens waiting to be fetched down, waiting to be discovered, waiting simply to be written down on music paper. It's invented out of nothing – and the creation out of nothing becomes the great obsessive concept of the time of which I wish to speak.

The application of the model of the artist creating the work of art, which is made in accordance with his own unfettered will, to social life and and to political life is the big, revolutionary and highly destructive step which was taken in the first place by Fichte, basing himself on Kant, but exaggerating and distorting his view

<sup>1</sup> What Herzen actually wrote was, 'What is the purpose of the song the singer sings?', but IB's version has acquired a life of its own: see RT2 xiv, note 2.

to a very high degree. One could quite see that Kant, who believed in the truth, who believed in reason, in spite of his passionate defence of the freedom of the self, would have been outraged and horrified by this. ‘I do not accept what nature offers up’, said Fichte, ‘because I must’, like Locke, the idea being that nature impresses something on me – ‘I do not accept what nature offers because I must; I believe it because I will.’<sup>1</sup> And he goes on to say, ‘Man shall be and do something’<sup>2</sup> – that is, man’s fate is to realise himself in some way, to objectify himself in some way.

The young Fichte still talks fairly, politically at least, harmless language. ‘To subject all irrational nature to himself, to rule over nature without restraint, and according to a man’s own laws, that is the ultimate goal of man.’<sup>3</sup> Very well, that simply is the old Kantian principle by which we must organise nature and not submit to her. ‘Civilisation means using all our powers for the purpose of complete freedom, complete independence of everything which is not ourselves, our pure ego’,<sup>4</sup> whatever that might be. ‘So act that you can look on the dictate of your will as a[n eternal] law for you.’<sup>5</sup> ‘To be subject to law means to be subject to our own insight. [I am still quoting Fichte.] [...] It means the right of a man to follow only his own insight, and this is violated by coercion.’<sup>6</sup> ‘Man shall determine himself and never allow anything foreign to determine him. He should be what he is

<sup>1</sup> **VM** 256. A more literal translation of the quotation in its context is: ‘I did not want to be part of nature, but my own creation; and this I have become because I willed it. [...] I do not accept anything because I must, I believe it because I so will it.’

<sup>2</sup> ‘Der Mensch soll etwas seyn und thun’: *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* [*Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*] (1794; VS), lecture 4, SW vi 383.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, lecture 1, SW vi 299.

<sup>4</sup> *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution* [*Contribution to Correcting Public Opinion about the French Revolution*] (1793; CCPO), book 1, chapter 1, **SW** vi 86–7.

<sup>5</sup> **VS** lecture 1, **SW** vi 297.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Ueber Errichtung des Vernunftreiches’ [‘On the Establishment of the Kingdom of Reason’], **SW** vii 574.

because he wills it';<sup>1</sup> then alone will he be free. [In a passage part of which I have already quoted he says:] 'I have chosen the system I have adopted [...] not because I must, I believe it because I will.'<sup>2</sup> Again, 'I am not determined by the end, I determine it.'<sup>3</sup>

A law is not drawn from the realm of fact; it is drawn from our own self. That is the big step forward. I don't discover, I make. He becomes more and more extravagant at this point. [The American philosopher Josiah Royce summed up his view in a striking sentence:] 'The world is the poem thus dreamed out by the inner life.'<sup>4</sup> This is a very extravagant way to say that the world is what I make of it, the world is as it appears to me, the world is what I choose to make it, particularly my moral world, my artistic world, my spiritual world; so that our worlds, as I say, are literally different if we differ morally – and that is why he says different philosophers believe different things because they have different characters.<sup>5</sup> First study the character of the philosopher, and you will know how the world appears to him and what he believes. There isn't a common criterion to people differently formed, with different ambitions and different characters. And he finally, suddenly says, 'I am wholly my own creation.'<sup>6</sup> This is the kind of thing which Bertrand Russell afterwards, not without reason, mocked at somewhat: he didn't think, on the whole, that he was his own creation, and with some reason. But this is merely Fichte's highly exaggerated way of saying that the world in which I live is shaped by my own deliberate and creative efforts.

However, when it was pointed out to him that, after all, the empirical world wasn't created by him, that he didn't invent

<sup>1</sup> loc. cit., **89** note **5** above.

<sup>2</sup> loc. cit., **89** note **1** above (running two non-consecutive sentences together).

<sup>3</sup> loc. cit., **85** note **2** above (differently translated).

<sup>4</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Lectures* (Boston and New York, 1892), 162. IB mistook he he a quotation from Royce as a quotation from Fichte.

<sup>5</sup> 'What sort of philosophy one chooses depends on what sort of man one is': 'Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre' ['First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge'] (1797), **SW** i 434.

<sup>6</sup> loc. cit., **89** note **1** above.

gravitation, he didn't invent matter, he didn't invent the laws of chemistry and physics, he said: Very well, 'I am a member of two worlds'<sup>1</sup> – there is, of course, the empirical world, which I don't wish to speak about, and there is a spiritual world where I really am free; and this is the only world which is worth discussing.

When this is applied to politics, he says: 'When a man allows laws to be made for him by the will of others, he thereby makes himself into a beast, that is, he injures his inborn human dignity.'<sup>2</sup> 'Man can be neither inherited nor sold nor given away. He cannot be the property of anyone, because he is and must remain his own property.'<sup>3</sup> And he goes on from there to say: 'Man may not make a rational being either virtuous or wise or happy against his will.'<sup>4</sup> This, as you can see, is a doctrine of extreme individualism. The end of man is self-development. As Herder spoke of groups or nations or communities or societies, so Fichte now, deriving directly from Herder and to some extent from Schiller's heroes, says a man must realise himself; and if anyone leads him by the nose, if anyone directs him, if anyone manipulates him, then he is a slave. This is extreme individualism, and that is why Fichte in his youth welcomed, as they all did, the French Revolution, because this appeared to him to break the chains of the awful French oligarchies, of the Church and the aristocracy, and allow each free French human being to vote and act in his own free way. When the Terror arose, Fichte duly recoiled; but that is still some time away.

At this stage you can see that this course of thought is clearly going to lead him to some kind of idealistic anarchism. The ultimate aim of all government is to make all government superfluous, because government directs you; but you are not free unless you direct yourself. The state, like all human institutions,

<sup>1</sup> **VM**, book 3, **SW** ii 288.

<sup>2</sup> **CCPO**, **SW** vi 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit von den Fürsten Europas, die sie bisher unterdrückten* [Reclaiming Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe Who Have Suppressed It] (1793), **SW** vi 11.

<sup>4</sup> **VS**, lecture 2, **SW** vi 309.

aims at its own destruction; all human institutions are only temporary makeshift affairs enabling immature people, who haven't yet understood what their aims are, not to injure each other. That is all institutions are: they are merely temporary devices, mere dodges, they have no Burkean sacredness in themselves, they aren't institutions which naturally flow from human nature, as, say, Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas thought – they are mere weapons, tools, dodges, utilitarian devices in order to keep people in some kind of leading-strings before they are completely mature. Once man is mature, institutions will drop off him. I repeat: the state, like all human institutions, aims at its own destruction; it is the aim of every government to make itself superfluous. This is a straight doctrine of self-directed, self-expressive anarchism, in which every man is his own master, every man realises himself as best he can.

Naturally the question must have arisen: What happens if I realise myself in manner X, and you realise yourself in manner Y, and we come into hideous collision with each other? If you have a community of people realising themselves in all kinds of haphazard fashions and banging into each other, which is bound to happen, surely this can't be quite right? And Fichte said: Well, yes, in these circumstances of course something has to be done, because that shows that people aren't completely mature. If men really understood themselves as they should understand themselves, they would realise that harmony and peace are the natural condition of the race; egoism would wither away – egoism is only a relic of ancient enslavement. People would become altruistic, love would develop among them, and they would live happily for ever after. This is a doctrine of a somewhat simplistic Rousseauian anarchism, which says: Institutions corrupt men. Remove institutions, and men will rise to their full size; and by nature no man ever wants to do damage to any other man, and if he knows enough about what he is, and where he is, he will in fact not do it. The only thing which causes men to be as destructive and as unhappy as they are, are these dreadful institutions which enslave them against their own

wills. This is how Fichte begins, at any rate in the late 1780s and early 1790s.

What is the function of man? The function of man is to realise his natural vocation. I have one vocation, you have another; I am a poet, you are a cook; you must realise your vocation as a cook, I must realise my vocation as a poet. This is called *das Aufgegebene* as opposed to *das Gegebene*. *Gegebene* is what is given – this I reject, this enslaves me. *Aufgegebene* is my vocation, that which I, with the full force of my imagination and will, conceive as being my end. And why is it something which I ought to realise? Because it's *my* end; not because it's good, which would make it good for everybody; not because it's right, which, for Kant at least, would make it right for everybody; not because I can interpret it as being part of a divine plan into which I must fit, so that I must first discover what the general blueprint is for the world, and then ask what place I occupy in it; not because there is an orchestra in which I have to play the flute and you have to play the violin, and if I try to play the violin there will be chaos. Not for that reason: it isn't a question of distribution of parts, or of trying to discover some general harmony, and then asking myself, 'And what part do I play in it?' It is because it is something which wells up inside me and tells me what to do. There is some kind of Romantic, intuitive, semi-impulsive force within me which tells me what it is that I must do in order to realise myself most generously and most richly. This is really a form of unbridled personal self-assertion of a highly non-Christian and pagan kind. And this is where Fichte is to be found somewhere in the middle 1790s.

And that is why he says [as paraphrased by the dramatist Ernst Raupach], 'To be free is nothing; to seek freedom is the very heaven', 'Frei seyn ist nichts, frei werden ist der Himmel'<sup>1</sup> – because life is activity, it isn't passive. The worst of all things is passive contemplation: that's enslavement – that's sheer miserable

<sup>1</sup> 'To be free is nothing, to become free is heaven': Torquato Tasso in Ernst Raupach, *Tasso's Tod: Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen* (Hamburg, 1835), act 1, scene 3, p. 56.

enslavement. The important thing is to act. To search for freedom is an activity, to be free is nothing at all – in fact, it doesn't exist. The life of a man grown to proper estate is constantly to seek, to realise himself, to overcome obstacles, to perfect himself, to realise all the potential which is locked up within him.

So far, so good – or so far, so bad. There is a certain perceptible shift, however, in Fichte's views at a certain point, which I will tell you about in a second. The only question is, why it should have arisen. There are many theories, of course, about the interplay of facts and ideas: we can't quite tell why anybody thought anything at the time when he did, with any certainty; we have no power of entering his mind at that moment, in spite of what some philosophers may think. But in the case of Fichte I think in about 1801 or 1802 a shift in his doctrines begins, of a rather significant and, in the end, rather sinister kind. Partly this is probably due to the failure of the French Revolution, which impressed even those who believed in it: failure in the sense that it led to the Jacobin Terror and not to the liberation, or apparent liberation, of those who took part in it, a great many of whom, particularly the philosophers and the thinkers, in fact found themselves hunted and persecuted – and some of course were beheaded or died in jail, like Condorcet. And therefore instead of the French Revolution being acclaimed as the great liberating force in which each man was able to assert his full human nature instead of being humiliated and degraded by some hideous – not even paternalist – feudal oppression by the rich or the priests or the politicians; instead of that, mobs, the guillotine, Robespierre, the Terror, tyranny succeeded. And this sobered the heads of a great many Germans, who then decided that the French Revolution was either premature or altogether a mistake.

And therefore this directed people's thoughts in other directions: perhaps individual self-assertion of the kind which they believed the French Revolution to stand for was not the right path. Perhaps something could be said for Burke's opposite point of view, whereby social association of a certain sort mustn't be broken too dramatically, by which people belong to each other in a

somewhat different fashion from that envisaged by the rigid individualist libertarianism which was preached by the early makers of the French Revolution. In part this is also due, probably, to the attacks upon Germany made by the French revolutionary armies, then succeeded by the attacks made upon her very successfully by Napoleon, which produced a great patriotic reaction, as we all know, a tremendous nationalist resistance to the foreign invader, which united the Germans as they had not been united before, and produced a huge sense of national solidarity against the common enemy.

At any rate, somewhere in the early nineteenth century Fichte begins saying: What actually is this self? What is this self which has to be liberated? What is this Schillerian hero who has to rise above circumstances, assert his will? Who is this man? What is he like? What is human nature, in fact? What is this nature which needs to assert itself? And he says: ‘Man [...] becomes man only among men.’<sup>1</sup> This sounds harmless enough. But he goes on: ‘Man *is* destined to live in society – he *must* do so – he is not a complete human being, and contradicts his nature, if he lives in isolation.’<sup>2</sup> He hadn’t always said that. There was a moment in which he thought that lonely thinkers were the only people worth thinking about – because these people rose above their environments, towered over them, and refused to accept the conventions of society – and looked with contempt and derision upon the mass of philistines and bourgeois by whom he was surrounded.

This, however, as I say, is altering slightly, most probably, historically speaking, because of the wave of common feeling which united him to his nation. The individual, he says, must endeavour to repay his debt to society. After all, the individual is made what he is by other men. Man is not an island,<sup>3</sup> and so on.

<sup>1</sup> *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* [Foundations of Natural Right according to the Principles of the Science of Knowledge] (1796; GN), chapter 1: **SW** iii 39.

<sup>2</sup> **VS**, lecture 3: **SW** vi 306.

<sup>3</sup> John Donne, ‘No man is an *Iland*’, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (London, 1624), 394.

He is born into a society<sup>1</sup> – Herder again – he is born into a stream of already existing social memories, social images, social feelings; he is not born naked, and doesn't receive impressions from some outside source; nor does he invent them for himself. He is born into a flux and into a stream of a national consciousness in which he is educated, which shapes him, and which creates indissoluble links between him and other members of his society. Indeed, that's what being a man is. Being a man is in some sense having communication with others. Those who can't communicate can't speak; those who can't speak can't think; those who can't think aren't men in the ordinary sense of the word.

Therefore the individual must endeavour to live in society; not only that, 'to repay his debt to society', which has made him. 'He must take his place' among men. He must strive to advance in some respect the perfection of the race which has done so much for him.<sup>2</sup> That is now his new *Beruf*,<sup>3</sup> that is his function, that is his vocation: he must do something for the society, not only for himself. He is part of the society, he mustn't think of himself as an isolated atom. True, once upon a time there were savage societies, says Fichte, in which everybody simply bowed beneath the yoke of material necessity, and people lived, as people do in savage societies, in terrible want and need, pressed together in a kind of half-conscious and savage state. But this oppressed man to such a degree that there was a revolt against it in the direction of individualism, of self-assertion. But this won't do: it atomises society, this drives people away from each other and impoverishes them in some way.

Very well. He must therefore render back to society what it has done for him, because he is what he is because of it, and if he doesn't do that, he cheats it. No man on earth has the right to leave his powers unused and live on those of others – you must not be a parasite. This is a straight Herderian sentiment. You mustn't be

<sup>1</sup> VS, lecture 3: SW vi 319.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 'Calling'.

a parasite and you mustn't be inactive. You must add your drop to the social treasure of society. This is an old populist cry, which derives directly from Herder, by whom Fichte was very evidently deeply influenced.

But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, in 1796: 'Nature is constituted by the organic union of all her forces, humanity by the unity of all individual wills.'<sup>1</sup> This is a rather mysterious statement. In what literal sense can you say there is an organic unity of all individual wills? He doesn't explain, but it's quite obvious that he thinks that men cannot function without reciprocal activity, without supplying each other's needs or living in some kind of relationship with each other in society. This seems a platitudinous enough idea, but it strikes Fichte with great force. And he then says: How can men develop their innate capacities, their potential, to its richest and fullest extent? They can't do it if they are too poor. They can't do it if they are too weak. Who will guarantee a standard of living? Who will give them protection, so that their most indefensible rights will not be trampled upon by stronger men? Why (he suddenly arrives at this surprising conclusion), the state must do that. How can the state do it? It can do it only if it really possesses the power to do it and is not itself subject to the buffetings of other states.

And so you get born in Fichte a kind of proto-socialist idea that the state has become autarkic. A minimum guaranteed standard of living must be granted to all the citizens. Certain rights which the citizens agree about, by means of an elaborate series of contracts, must be established. How can the state be guaranteed to be able to perform its function? By being protected against the buffetings of other states, by being protected against the vagaries of the stock market, by being protected against any kind of blows, any kind of changes, which might come upon it from outside. Therefore it must become autarkic. It must protect itself against other states; it must cease to trade with other states; it must cease to have financial exchanges with other states; it must have its own money and never

<sup>1</sup> GN, part 2: SW iii 208.

allow this money to be exported. It must be totally self-sufficient. Only if you have a totally self-sufficient state – and Fichte was a very extreme thinker, as you can see – only if you are self-sufficient room can the state guarantee the standard of living and so on – socialism in one country. This is the famous *geschlossene Handelsstaat*<sup>1</sup> of Fichte; this is the famous idea that only in a state which is protected against buffeting from outside can the citizens actually perform their full functions and rise to their full stature. Otherwise the state might be too weak to protect them or, alternatively, the citizens may be ruined by unfortunate speculation abroad, in foreign securities.

Therefore you get the notion in Fichte of a kind of socialism in one country, a completely self-protected, autarkic, protectionist state. And it is this that gives him a title to be considered as one of the fathers of collectivism, or socialism, or anyhow of the welfare state, of the organisation of the lives of the citizens.

We've travelled some distance, you will perceive, from the notion of the free citizen subject to nobody else's will, of the free citizen no longer interfered with by anyone, exfoliating himself like a plant in the sun without any other kind of influence being brought to bear upon him. This is simply in the course of trying to develop what are the actual conditions in which men can do this. And he then observes: The state cannot be artificially constructed out of any kind of material – the state is organic, the state is like a tree.

At a certain point he becomes frightened that perhaps, if this is done, the individual will be sacrificed to the state, as used to happen. Perhaps the state will become tyrannical or despotic in the way in which, say, the French state under Louis XIV quite plainly was – worse than that, in which the state under Frederick the Great in Prussia was. He may have made his citizens rich and he may have developed their intellectual capacities, founded academies, done a great deal for them; but there was always the corporal stick, there was always a policeman at the back, the power of the king

<sup>1</sup> 'Closed Commercial State'.

was absolute and he was able to do what he liked with his citizens. And this surely must be avoided at all costs. Even though you may not speak of a king, you may think of a state. And so, he says, ‘in no circumstances should the individual, considered strictly as an individual, be sacrificed for the whole [so far, so good] however unimportant the individual, however great the interests of the whole that are at stake’.<sup>1</sup> This is an impeccable liberal sentiment.

But then he goes on: ‘But part of the whole must often be placed in peril on account of the whole. The victims are selected not by the ruler but by the peril itself’ – whatever that might mean. They are selected ‘from among the individuals’.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the ruler can sacrifice me provided that he acts in the name of the peril. If there is a peril to the state, some people must be sacrificed to the whole, not because the ruler wants it but because the peril demands it. But then the question arises: Who shall say that there is a peril and who shall choose the victims? About that Fichte is silent. Gradually you will find out that he thinks that a certain group of persons is charged with this particular duty.

He then harks back to his aesthetic ideal. Now he is in love with the state, now he is considering how human beings should live in societies, and he says: ‘The absolute state is in its form [...] an artistic institution, intended to direct all individual power towards the life of the race.’<sup>3</sup> This is some distance away from the original individualism. If the state is a work of art, then there must be an artist. Well, perhaps the artist is an unconscious artist, perhaps he is Herder’s artist, perhaps he is society itself, the people as a whole acting in a kind of half-conscious capacity and creating the state even as they create epics or they create dances – there is perhaps no individual founder, no particular Lysurgus, no particular person who makes the state. But still the state is an artistic entity; and if it is an artistic entity, all the parts of it must subserve the general

<sup>1</sup> *Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten, und seine Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit* [On The Nature of the Scholar, and His Manifestations in the Realm of Freedom] (1806), lecture 8, **SW** vi 424.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> [*The Characteristics of the Present Age*] (1806; GGZ), lecture 10, **SW** vii 144.

artistic plan; if all the parts must subservise the artistic plan, then I, as an individual, become somewhat subjugated to the plan of the whole, and my liberty, which was originally spoke of by Fichte, becomes, to say the least, somewhat compromised.

He goes on to say: 'Every nation wants to extend its own peculiar good as far as it possibly can, and, so far as in it lies, to incorporate the whole of mankind within itself, thereby following an urge planted in men by God.'<sup>1</sup> This is going rather further. If I know myself to be a good society, then so long as there are other societies outside me which are regarded as less good, it becomes my duty before God to absorb these other societies, because only by absorbing them can I guarantee, says Fichte, that they will not enslave me. If I am a good society, and there are some less good societies by the side of me, I am in some danger of being corrupted by them. The only way in which I can avoid the danger of being corrupted by them is by eating them, by swallowing them. By swallowing them I make them impotent to injure me and indeed raise them to my own status. Apparently I am doing them good; but if you are a citizen of these other societies, this act of absorption might appear in a somewhat different light. This Fichte doesn't examine at all.

We have now arrived at the point at which he really abandons Kant, and to some extent abandons Schiller, and returns to some kind of Herderian ideal of unity. And he is the earliest German thinker who is not a Catholic reactionary; he is the first Protestant progressive (as he certainly thought of himself and was thought of by others) to praise the Middle Ages because of the magnificent unity of the society of the Middle Ages, in which men acted as a great harmonious whole – they trusted in each other, they loved each other, they believed in each other, and they acted as a loving society, thrusting themselves forward towards a single ideal instead of being a ghastly atomised competitive society of self-seeking

<sup>1</sup> *Über Machiavelli, als Schriftsteller, und Stellen aus seinen Schriften* [On Machiavelli, as an Author, and Passages from His Writings] (1807; UM), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's nachgelassene Werke* [Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Posthumous Works], ed. I. H. Fichte (Bonn, 1834–5) (NW) iii 423.

egotists. This, however, as I say, points in a somewhat different, rather Burkean direction, and away from the original passionate, self-expressive ideal of the pure artist making his own life in whatever way he chooses.

The big break occurs somewhere around 1803. I will now read you a quotation and you will see that we have arrived at a rather critical point of Fichte's thought. He suddenly announces: 'The life of reason consists in this, that the individual forget himself in the species, that he must risk his life for the life of all and sacrifice his life to theirs';<sup>1</sup> and then goes one step further: 'The individual doesn't exist; he [...] must vanish [...]. The group – the *Gattung* – alone exists. Only the group is real.'<sup>2</sup> This is the exact opposite of where we began; it's a complete reversal of a hundred and eighty degrees.

What is the individual which is expressing itself? Originally it was some kind of recognisable human being, originally it was a man of flesh and blood seeking to make his life. But this won't do. There always is in Fichte's thought the idea that behind the empirical man there is a transcendent self, something like the divine spirit which blows through the universe, something like God, something like a great universal principle with which all individuals seek to unite themselves, as a flame seeks to unite itself with the great central flame of the great sun which illuminates the world. This emerges from time to time, and you suddenly realise that the self he is talking about, or the true ego, is some kind of great metaphysical theological self, which is really not individual human beings at all, but something like the universe as a kind of animate entity, of which we are merely aspects, or in which we are merely fragments. But for the first time he announces that *the* individual, the ego, that which has to express itself, that which has to be free, that which shapes the world in accordance with its will, is not the individual but the group, and the individual is a mere fragment of the group. That's the beginning of the great myth of the superpersonal society

<sup>1</sup> **GGZ**, lecture 3, **SW** vii 35.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, **SW** vii 37–8.

in which persons are, if not cogs or wheels, at any rate elements of some kind.

And this flatly contradicts his original view, where he says, for example: What about liberty? Liberty is a thing which of course is always on his lips and always at the end of his pen. Liberty: What is liberty? Liberty is something which men must preserve, liberty is activity, liberty is spontaneity, liberty is hearing the divine voice which tells me how to realise myself, liberty is that which makes me free of the ghastly empirical world, which is a mere treadmill, and so forth. Happiness cannot be the human goal, because if happiness were the human goal, liberty would be a nuisance. It would be a nuisance because liberty allows me the possibility of choosing wrongly as well as choosing rightly. If happiness were the goal, would it not be far better if I was attached like a wheel to some well-oiled machine, and therefore never had any alternatives at all? To be conditioned, to be brainwashed, to be attached to some huge organic entity as an element, not able to liberate myself from it, might actually make me satisfied and happy; but what it will take away from me, of course, is my individual liberty, my self-assertiveness, that which makes me a man – in short, my will.

This is Kantian language; this now evaporates completely. Here is another passage, written about 1813: ‘To men as they are by birth and through their ordinary education, our philosophical theory is absolutely incomprehensible, for the objects whereof it speaks don’t exist for them. They do not possess the faculty by which one can apprehend these objects.’ It is as if one were talking to ‘men blind from birth, who know things and their relations only by touch’, and do not understand what colours are or their relations.<sup>1</sup>

This means there are various kinds of men: there are men who are blind and there are men who can see; there are philosophers and there are non-philosophers; and it’s only the philosophers who truly understand what man is and what liberty is. The philosophers

<sup>1</sup> ‘Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre’, *Einleitungsvorlesungen in die Wissenschaftslehre* [‘Introduction to the Science of Knowledge’, *Introductory Lectures on the Science of Knowledge*] (1813), **NW** i 4–5.

are the only people who truly hear the voice of the superself, of this rather mystical element which drives us forward, and they alone understand what it is that it says. And anybody who dares to question it is subversive in principle. He says: To question the authority of the great imperative, which only the philosophers can hear, is immoral in itself – it shows that you have no moral sense. ‘To compel men to adopt the rightful form of government, to impose Right upon them by force, is not only the right, but the sacred duty, of every man who has both the insight and the power to do so. There may even be circumstances in which the single man has this right against the whole of mankind; for, as against him and Right, there is no man who has either rights or liberty. He may compel them to *Right*, that being an absolutely definite conception, valid for all men alike; a conception which they all *ought* to have and which they all will have as soon as they raise themselves to his level of intelligence, and which, in the meanwhile, thanks to the grace of God working in him, he holds in the name of all and as their representative. The truth of this conception he must take upon his own conscience. He, we may say, is the compulsive power, ordained of God<sup>1</sup> – which is a reference to St Paul.<sup>2</sup>

We have travelled some way. The philosopher is now seen as Prospero, and the ordinary man is now seen as Caliban. The philosopher has the right to compel men to do that which, were they philosophers, they would compel themselves to do. This is the old doctrine by which you say: You don’t know what is good for you; I do. If you had my intelligence you would do it freely; if you don’t do it freely, it is because you don’t understand. Either you understand what I understand, in which case I don’t have to compel you, or you resist, which is evidence of the fact that you don’t understand, and I have to compel you. In other words, to

<sup>1</sup> *Die Staatslehre [The Theory of the State]* (1813), **SW** iv 436; IB uses the free translation by C. E. Vaughan, *Studies in the History of Political Philosophy before and after Rousseau* [1925], ed. A. G. Little, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1939), ii 126, with a few, possibly extemporaneous, changes (Vaughan’s version is followed here).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.’ Romans 13:1.

make a man free in this sense means to give him that liberty which, were he different from what he is, he would want. And if he is not different from what he is, so much the worse for him, and he must be made different by me, because I know what he really wants, I know his secret self, of which he is not aware himself, and it is in the name of this self that I compel his unfortunate empirical self to obey my orders. This is a programme which almost every despot in history has, in one form or another, proclaimed, and it now emerges from the mouth of Fichte.

‘The people has the metaphysical right to realise its destiny by every weapon of cunning or force’,<sup>1</sup> he says in an essay on Machiavelli. This is straight statism of the most compulsive, the most tyrannical kind. He has the grace at this point to say that freedom is a two-edged weapon, that in fact ‘it is not nature but freedom’ which causes conflict.<sup>2</sup> Savages freely choose to devour their enemies. Later nations, with the power of laws and unity and culture, do so too. Culture is not a deterrent to violence; culture can be a tool of violence.<sup>3</sup> This is quite an interesting point, because in the eighteenth century the assumption was that the more cultivated you were, the more peaceful you were; the more cultivated you were, the more harmonious you were. It wasn’t possible to know and be cultivated and yet to be brutal and to be violent. Fichte sees that liberty cuts both ways. You are free to do good, you are free to do harm. Culture simply increases your weapons; your weapons of destruction are more effective if you are civilised, less effective if you are savage. But liberty by itself doesn’t stop you from inflicting harm; in fact it may cause you to inflict more harm.

<sup>1</sup> Not in **UM**, *pace* IB, or (as some authors aver) in *Reden an die deutsche Nation* [*Addresses to the German Nation*] (1808; RDN). The earliest appearance of this ‘quotation’ I have found is in Wickham Steed’s preface to Aurel Kolnai, *The War against the West* (New York, 1938), 8–9. Maybe a paraphrase masquerading as a quotation?

<sup>2</sup> **VM**, loc. cit. (84, note 2), 269.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* (paraphrase).

Therefore somehow this has to be prevented. It must be prevented by making men less egoistic. 'When men shall no longer be divided by selfish purposes and their powers no longer exhausted by struggles with one another, nothing will remain for them but to direct their united strength against the one common enemy who still remains unsubdued – resistant, uncultivated nature.'<sup>1</sup> This is a very worthy sentiment, which both Hegel and Marx both expressed, particularly Marx.

But, Fichte says, we haven't arrived at this moment yet. What must we do in the meantime? In the meanwhile we have to compel, in the meanwhile we have to coerce. There are too many barbarians about, and too few philosophers. It is the philosophers who must set themselves up as a guild of rulers, and it's no good their trying to infuse their knowledge into the masses, because the masses are brutish and they live by faith. And so you gradually get the emergence of a doctrine of doublethink, you gradually get the emergence of a doctrine by which there are higher persons and lower persons. The higher persons must rule the lower persons, no doubt for their benefit, but not in such a way that the lower persons themselves can understand why this is done. You hope that by means of this kind of thing you will gradually raise these people to a level of intelligence where they will themselves become liberated and free and equal to you, and it will not be necessary to coerce them. But meanwhile centuries may pass. This is a return to someone like Grimm, or even someone like Voltaire, who thinks that the only way to cultivate people is by coercing the unruly mob at the moment, in the hope that perhaps in a hundred or two hundred or five hundred years' time it will no longer be necessary to do it. This is a dictatorship of the wise, who have to use every kind of power in order to mould the mob, no doubt for its own benefit, but certainly against its wishes.

Let me read you the famous passage which occurs in the *Speeches to the German Nation*, which he delivered in Berlin, when Napoleon was there, to a rather small audience which took no notice of it.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* 277.

After the lectures were published they became a tremendous success, and they have been read and reread in Germany from that day to this. He says:

It is time to reveal to the light of day the essence of the German character. Here is the criterion of discrimination: either you believe in an original principle in man – freedom, perfectibility, infinite progress of our species – or you believe in none of this: you may even have an intuition of the opposite. All those who have within them a creative quickening of life, or else, assuming that such a gift has been withdrawn from them, at least [...] await the moment when they are caught up in the torrent of original life, [...] have some confused presentiment of this kind of freedom, and have towards it not hatred nor fear but a feeling of love – these are part of primal humanity, and, considered as a people, constitute [what he calls] the *Urvolk*, the primal people, in short, *the* people, [and then he adds] I mean the German people.

By Germans, of course, he meant what Hegel meant – he meant all Germans, all Frenchmen, all Englishmen, all Scandinavians, everybody whom he respected in northern Europe.

All those, on the other hand, who have resigned themselves to represent only a derivative, second-hand product, men who think of themselves in this way, these will become such in fact and shall pay the price of their belief. They are only an annex to life. Not for them those pure springs which flowed before them and which still flow around them. They are but the echo, coming from the rock, of a voice which is silent. Considered as a people, they are excluded from the *Urvolk*, they are strangers, they are outsiders. The nation which has the name of German to this day is the nation which is creative and original.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **RDN**, Seventh Address, **SW** vii 374. IB's translation is very free, and the last sentence is a compressed paraphrase.

And then he goes on to say that the principle of exclusion is this: ‘all those who believe in spiritual reality and in freedom of the life of the spirit, all those who believe in the eternal progress of the spirit through the instrumentality of freedom, whatever their native land and whatever the language they speak, they are of our race, they are part of our people, and they will join it late or soon. All those who believe in arrested being, in retrogression, in eternal cycles, or else those who put an inanimate nature at the helm of the world’ – like the French Encyclopedists – ‘whatever be their native country, whatever be their language, they are strangers to us, they are not Germans, and one should hope that they will be wholly cut off from our people.’<sup>1</sup>

This looks like a chauvinistic German passage, but it isn’t that. To do Fichte justice, the criterion of being creative is being creative. He would like to think of the Germans as that, but he is prepared to accept into this particular group anybody who, as he says, is full of artistic feeling, full of creation, spontaneity, sense of these voices which speak to you from within, some kind of sacred principle which animates you and so on – he becomes very mystical at this stage. And there are these others who are mere grovelling philistines, who lead their lives in some kind of bourgeois fashion, who will never be able to hear this voice, and will therefore have to be led by the others.

And so you get a complete theory of two divisions of mankind – the rulers and the ruled, the superior and the inferior, the creative and the uncreative. And then the final cry is: ‘Also her ein Zwingherr zur Deutscheit’ – ‘Hither, a man who will compel us to Germanism’ – ‘whoever it might be: we hope that the King will perform this service; if not, then perhaps a senate.’<sup>2</sup> The prince is raised above the laws of individual ethics to a far higher level.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* 375.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Aus dem Entwurfe zu einer politischen Schrift im Frühlinge 1813’ [‘From the Draft of a Political Pamphlet in Spring 1813’], *ibid.* 565.

This is a complete circle: you cannot start from one point and get to the other. Fichte begins with a paean to individual liberty of a rather Schiller-like kind and ends with a tremendous hymn to the state and, above all, not only to the state but to the group of Platonic guardians who conduct the state and subjugate everyone else to their wills, because they alone hear the secret voice, they alone are imaginative, they alone are creative, they alone are the artists.

This is the way in which some Romantics saw Napoleon. Fichte didn't, because Napoleon was an enemy of Germany, and therefore he didn't like him. But there were those who rose above this nationalist feeling and saw in Napoleon some great artist who was moulding mankind in new shapes – a great artist in politics. And these people really spoke in this kind of rather horrifying language, and said: Either you are a creator or you are not. If you are a creator, then you can lift people to a very high level by your own marvellous and inspired efforts. And if you are not creative, then the best thing which can happen to you is to be lifted by others. The fact that you may suffer agonies, you may even be killed in battles, in the course of this lifting, is unfortunate; but surely you will never have attained such a height before, and you ought to bless the hour in which these agonies and these tortures have lifted you to a height of intense experience to which never, never in your dreary bourgeois life could you have risen without it.

This is the true Romantic note, which afterwards is to be heard in all kinds of heroic statements from Treitschke onwards in Germany, to the Italian Fascists and the German Nazis, to a great many other persons of this kind. And this derives its force from this division which is drawn by Fichte between the real man, who is imaginative, forceful, an artist, and the unreal man, who is mere human fodder, who is mere material out of which the artist as legislator moulds the society. You will find it in its fullest degree, for example, in someone deeply influenced by Fichte like Carlyle. Carlyle is a strange figure who has no true ancestors in the English political tradition, and no progeny either, who derives directly from German Romanticism and reinfects German Romanticism him-

self. Carlyle also believed in something of this kind. He believed that obedience was the greatest of the virtues, that the best thing which a nation could do is to submit itself to some violent man of genius who will lift it to some tremendous height, away from the ludicrous, utilitarian, dreary ideals of mere everyday life with its small satisfactions, its small pains and its small pleasures. This is the violent, Romantic, semi-Fascist ideal for which Fichte is responsible.

It's perhaps time for me to in this lecture. Let me say two things. One is that there are three Fichtes, each of whom has his followers. There is Fichte number one, who praises the independent artist, the self-expression of the individual, and he is the father of Byron, he is the father of all those artists in the nineteenth century who say that if the call of art is the highest call, then in order to paint divine pictures you can abandon your wife, you can destroy your children, you can do whatever you wish, because creativity gives certain rights, because the artist is a sacred vessel to whom everyone must yield, and he has special rights in society not like those of other people. This is the notion of the artist as the creator who dominates his environment –not necessarily politically – who has special claims upon society and can do things which might otherwise be regarded as misdeeds or crimes, because he produces immortal works of genius which enrich mankind. That's the early Fichte, who has no political or social implications. This is Schiller's tragic hero: he may cause terrible damage, but he is a bigger figure than the others, and therefore has larger claims upon mankind.

The middle Fichte is the man who says: We must organise society as best we can – we hope that one day people will all be rational, they will all be good. This is the *Rechtstaat*<sup>1</sup> Fichte. We must create a body of disinterested bureaucrats of a highly educated kind – exactly what was recommended by vom Stein, by Hegel afterwards – a series of disinterested, highly educated managerial persons who will sacrifice themselves upon the altar of the public good, who will have no private interest to pull at them,

<sup>1</sup> 'Rule of law'.

who will manage to conduct society in the direction of higher enlightenment and education, conduct it in a direction in which society cannot conduct itself. Democracy always leads ultimately to bloodshed, tyranny, mobs and ignorance. The only way in which mankind can advance is under the tutelage of disinterested and devoted educators – for these purposes to be called soldiers, ministers and other Platonic guardians. That’s the second Fichte, and that is the Prussian state. That is the ideal of the *Rechtstaat*, that is the ideal of an oligarchical state in which we have no democracy but the ideal of disinterested service on the part of special individuals, self-chosen to some extent, people who really know the inner light, in Fichte’s sense.

And there is a third Fichte, which is a tremendous mystical, Romantic paean to some kind of violent ideal of the master race – or not necessarily race, master religion, master folk, master culture, masters of history, master class, anything you please – whom history has advanced into the front ranks, and who because of this have a right to dominate the others because they are nearer to God; because they are an inspired group who have a right to assert themselves, no matter what happens to those below them. And those below them must bless them, because they alone are able to confer one hour of intense life upon them, which is surely worth a cycle of Cathay.<sup>1</sup>

Those are the three Fichtes. And each, as you can see, had his followers in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This is the figure who betrayed the rationalist and ultimately libertarian and ultimately even democratic ideals of Kant, and the harmless, benevolent, decent populist ideals of Herder, who thought that there were many flowers in the garden and they needn’t struggle with each other at all.

Let me finally remind you that the person who foresaw where this was going to lead was the poet Heinrich Heine, who in a very famous passage said, warning the French after 1830 not to down

<sup>1</sup> ‘Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay’: Alfred Tennyson, ‘Locksley Hall’ (1842), line 184.

their weapons, not to disarm, because of the fearful danger from their neighbours. He said: ‘Kantians will appear who will [...] ruthlessly with sword and axe hack through the foundations of our European life [...]. Armed Fichteans will come, whose fanatical wills neither fear nor interest can touch.’<sup>1</sup> And who shall say – who shall say that he was altogether mistaken?

Thank you very much.

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<sup>1</sup> From a work published first in French and then in German (under different titles): *De l'Allemagne depuis Luther* [*On Germany after Luther*], part 3, *Revue des deux mondes* [*Review of Two Worlds*], 15 December 1834, 676; the peroration containing the passage in question was cut by the censor from the first German edition, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* [*On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*], in *Der Salon* [*The Salon*] ii (Hamburg, 1835), but Heine restored it in the second edition (Hamburg, 1852), 296–7.