ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

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The series will make digitally available both selected published items and edited transcripts of unpublished material.

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Isaiah Berlin was born in Riga, now capital of Latvia, in 1909. When he was six, his family moved to Russia; there in 1917, in Petrograd, he witnessed both Revolutions – Social Democratic and Bolshevik. In 1921 he and his parents emigrated to England.

Berlin was educated at St Paul's School, London, and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He remained at Oxford all his life, becoming successively a Fellow of All Souls, a Fellow of New College, Professor of Social and Political Theory, and founding President of Wolfson College. He also held the Presidency of the British Academy. His main published works are *Karl Marx*, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, *The Age of Enlightenment*, *Russian Thinkers*, *Concepts and Categories*, *Against the Current, Personal Impressions*, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, *The Sense of Reality*, *The Proper Study of Mankind*, *The Roots of Romanticism*, *The Power of Ideas*, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, *Liberty*, *The Soviet Mind* and *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*. As an exponent of the history of ideas he was awarded the Erasmus, Lippincott and Agnelli Prizes; he also received the Jerusalem Prize for his lifelong defence of civil liberties. He died in 1997.

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HOW TO COUNTER THE ENLIGHTENMENT

SIX PUBLIC LECTURES

ISAIAH BERLIN

Edited by Henry Hardy

OXFORD

THE ISAIAH BERLIN LITERARY TRUST

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Editorial Note

The six lectures collected here were delivered without full scripts, and have not been published severally or jointly in English in book form. Footnotes are editorial except where indicated otherwise.

Berlin's translations are often very free – sometimes too free. But they usually capture the sense and tone of the original, and I have on the whole altered them only sparingly, in order to maintain the characteristic flavour of his versions. Readers who wish to deploy in other contexts the passages he quotes here are advised to check the originals.

H.H.

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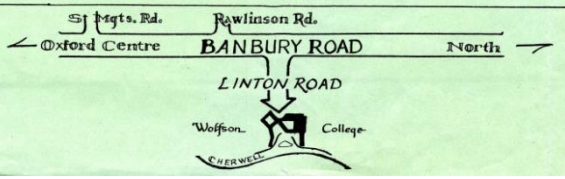


The flyer for the lecture series in which the first lecture was delivered

Some Opponents of the Enlightenment

This lecture was delivered in the Hall of Wolfson College, Oxford, on 11 February 1975 as the third of the Wolfson College Lectures for 1975, whose theme was 'The Enlightenment and Its Critics'. The following is a lightly edited transcript of a very poor recording. The very beginning of the lecture is missing in the recording and has been supplied here by adapting an opening sentence from Berlin's 1973 essay 'The Counter-Enlightenment', which may be found in his *Against the Current* (1979).

An attempt at a verbatim transcript was circulated as a libretto for a play-through of the recording on 20 March 2014, at a conference on 'Isaiah Berlin's Enlightenment' in the Leonard Wolfson Auditorium at Wolfson; that transcript contained a handful of mistranscriptions here corrected.

OPPOSITION TO THE CENTRAL IDEAS of the French Enlightenment, and of its allies and disciples in other European countries, is as old as, indeed sometimes older than, the movement itself. There were a great many who began the attack within the Enlightenment itself. But I propose to deal only with those who, though they stated their positions in somewhat exaggerated terms, did so in a much more vivid fashion, so that those more moderate and more sensible men who followed them perhaps spoke better sense, but less memorably.

Let me begin by saying that Professor Gay has perfectly correctly pointed out, in the excellent lecture which inaugurated this series, that the Encyclopedists, the *lumières*, were not a monolithic group: that the notion that they all believed exactly the same thing, that they all believed in the indivisibility of progress, that they were all optimists, that they all believed in natural science, that they all believed in some kind of linear advance of humanity which nothing could stop, that they all rejected religion, art and all the rest of it, and concentrated upon some kind of purely materialistic, purely scientific ideal, is not true.

Turgot, Condorcet, Holbach were, on the whole, optimists: Voltaire, Grimm, Rousseau, La Mettrie were profoundly pessimistic – certainly Voltaire did not think that much could be done with humanity as it was. Grimm thought it might take three or four

hundred years or more to make human beings even faintly rational, and even that would be accomplished with the most appalling difficulties. Rousseau and Morelly and Mably believed in austerity and simplicity, and had a kind of rigorously stoic, rather Spartan ideal. Voltaire did not believe in this at all: Voltaire believed in the ripest fruits of culture. His ideal societies were the Athens of the fifth century BC, the late Roman Republic and early Empire, the Florence of the Renaissance and the great age of Louis XIV (about which there is nothing particularly austere or rigorous or simple), and in this respect he was followed by a good many of the others, certainly by people like d'Alembert, and indeed by the majority of the Encyclopedists, I should say.

Some were Christians, at least technically – Condillac and Mably were, after all, abbés; Voltaire and Rousseau were deists, though of rather different types. Helvétius, Holbach, La Mettrie, in most of his moods Diderot, were rigorous atheists. Outside France, Priestley, Price, Moses Mendelssohn firmly believed in the immortality of the soul: Diderot, Holbach, Helvétius believed that this was a pure fiction invented by priests. Some passionately believed in property, which became one of the cornerstones of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in the French Revolution. Mably and Morelly did not believe in this at all, and believed that money and property were the root of all the evils of mankind.

So there were differences. And of course these differences did not seem quite so great, either in the perspective of history, which tends to obliterate these things, and tends to make people who believed the same sort of thing much closer and more similar to each other than in fact they were; and partly because their enemies tended to identify them with each other and did not much bother with the differences when what they wanted to concentrate on were the odious views which they were thought to hold in common. And indeed it is true that there were certain basic propositions that they did, most of them, hold in common. They certainly believed in naturalism – that is to say they believed that the sources of knowledge were not to be found in tradition, not to

be found in sacred books, not to be found in priestly dogma, not to be found in some kind of occult metaphysical speculation, not revealed to some magic eye which penetrated empirical experiences in some rather special fashion. They believed that they were ultimately to be found in observation, in the observation of nature and in scientific research: that is to say, observation and experiment. At least for the most part they believed in this.

And they believed something else. They believed that the sources of human misery were ignorance, idleness – which led to ignorance – and the fact that there were certain childish fantasies in which human beings had been held for too long, partly as a result of their own incurable stupidity – in some cases incurable, in other cases curable – partly because it was in the interests of certain men who sought power to throw dust in the eyes of a great many men and teach them all kinds of fantasies, in order to preserve their own power. That is what Helvétius called 'interested error'.[1]

This was the conspiracy view of history. I do not say they all believed that, but for the most part I think it could be said that they did. They did not believe in tradition, they did not believe in privilege, they did not believe in clerical censorship: their common assumption, on the whole, was that the only thing which could

[1] It seems most likely that IB took this phrase from an excessively free passage in a translation of Holbach's *Système de la nature* ('London', 1770). In part 1, chapter 1, 'De la nature', 9–10, Holbach writes: 'recourons à nos sens, que l'on nous a faussement fait regarder comme suspects' ('Let us have recourse to our senses, which we have been falsely led to regard as unreliable'). In his 1820 translation Samuel Wilkinson renders this as 'let us recover our senses, which interested error has taught us to suspect'. H. D. Robinson borrows Wilkinson's invention in his 1868 version: 'let us fall back on our senses, which errour, interested errour, has taught us to suspect'. However creative this Englishing may be, the sentiment seems entirely characteristic of Holbach, who writes, for example, of '*erreurs utiles*' ('useful errors'), ibid., part 2 ('London', 1780), chapter 12, 'L'Athéisme, est-il compatible avec la morale?', 358, and of 'hommes, fortement intéressés à l'erreur' ('men, with a strong interest in error') in *Le Bon Sens* ('London', i.e. Amsterdam, 1772), § 82, p. 94. I am grateful to Roger Hausheer for putting me on to the trail of this hitherto elusive phrase – one of which Berlin was fond.

liberate mankind was knowledge; and the model of knowledge was provided, of course, by the great scientific inventors and discoverers. Just as Newton had managed, with a few relatively simple propositions, to determine the position and movement of every particle in physical space, so there was no reason why the same method, if applied to the social and moral problems which had plagued mankind for a long time, should not lead to equally certain and reliable consequences. The moral and political universe was in a state of chaos. There were a great many views knocking around against each other without any specific authority or evidence for any of them. The whole thing was in a fearful mess, a kind of Augean stables, which only the application of a method which had been successful in the sphere of nature would ultimately manage to cleanse.

This was certainly a very firm belief of a great many members of the Enlightenment. And the view was that, unless we obtained knowledge of what we were, what the universe was, what our position was in the universe, we should remain enslaved by it: that is to say, we should be victims – of chance, of nature, which we imperfectly knew and imperfectly interpreted, and of wicked men. We should be at the mercy of forces which we could not control, because we did not understand them. The only way of liberating ourselves was by understanding the universe in which we lived, and ourselves. And this could reliably be done only by scientific methods which had proved themselves, at any rate in the realm of inanimate nature. 'Know, and the knowledge shall make you free.' This had been said many years before, by Jesus,[2] but it was not the kind of knowledge that he spoke about which these men were after. Spiritual or theological or metaphysical knowledge had led mankind into morasses; what was needed was the kind of knowledge for which positive evidence could be given by observers, making statements which were capable of being publicly checked and verified by any intelligent man applying himself to the problem. There was no such thing as occult knowledge; no such

[2] 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' John 8:32.

thing as private knowledge. Knowledge must be made open to public scrutiny. Only communicable knowledge of a public nature was worth having.

And knowledge was cumulative. We knew more than our predecessors; we knew more mathematics than Euclid or Archimedes; we knew more about medicine than Galen. We perhaps did not know quite so much about architecture as the ancients, in which case we must take lessons from the great treatises on architecture of the ancient world, and the great return to neoclassicism which discovered certain truths which had been distorted, perverted, obscured and otherwise lost during the long dark night of the irrational Middle Ages. That was, roughly speaking, the belief.

As a result of all these beliefs, a body of doctrine did grow, which was mainly embodied in the *Encyclopédie*, which promised to liberate mankind from the superstitions, the prejudices, the stupidities, the childish guesswork, the nonsenses on which humanity had been fed for far too long. And exactly the same thing was true about moral values – moral and political values. This was true not only of statements of fact but also of statements of what men should be and how they should live. Reason, which had been such a powerful instrument in describing and analysing the universe, would also provide men with answers to the question of what men should be and how they should live; what was good, what was right, what was useful, what would make men happy, what would make men just, what would make men virtuous.

The view here is that of a kind of hidden treasure to which we must find the path. Previous generations had failed to do **so**. The path did not lie in the Bible, the path did not lie in metaphysics, the path did not lie in the primitive superstitions of ordinary folk. The path lay in only one place, and that is the region of scientific research. And if we could obtain all the true answers to all the questions which plague mankind – and you must remember that, if you were a scientist, at least at that time, you believed that to all questions there must be one true answer, all the other answers being false, for that was surely the nature of truth and the nature of scientific enquiry – if ever you could obtain all the true answers

and you put them together, they would form the jigsaw puzzle of human existence. By discovering the answers to such moral questions as what to do and how to live; what kind of political arrangements were best for mankind; what kind of moral values were those which had to be pursued – in this way you would finally be able to obtain a kind of blueprint, anyhow, of what the perfect society would be like. It might be difficult to obtain it, because men were stupid, because men were weak, because nature was against us for this or that reason. But at least you would know what you fell short of when you fell short of it, and this, at least, would be something. That was certainly the ideal of this age.

This is a doctrine which they inherited from humanism – from the Renaissance – and which they did a great deal to elaborate and to improve. There were a great many differences about where these answers were to be found. Some were intellectualist, like d'Alembert or even Voltaire; and some believed, like Rousseau, that the answer lay in the uncorrupted human heart. It was not the brain but the heart which had to be in the right place. If only people could free themselves from the corrupting influence of the institutions which had distorted them from their original natural selves, they would perceive what the proper goals of men were, in some luminous way. But what they all had in common was the belief that there were certain universal truths, true for all men, in all places, at all times; that these truths were, in principle, discoverable by the kind of methods which they had now come upon; and that once these truths were discovered and learnt, this would automatically improve human life in a very large, indeed in a very radical, fashion.

I can see that it must have been extremely exciting to live in those days. It must have been a very exalted moment of the human consciousness, on the part of people who felt that at last, at last, we knew what to do. At last we have shaken off all the error and the stupidity and the nonsense of the past. Condorcet talks about this in a very lyrical fashion in that famous *Esquisse*, where he says: 'Soon the sun will shine only upon free men, who will accept no master but their own reason; and tyrants and slaves, priests and

their stupid and wicked tools will be seen only in the pages of history and on the stage.'[3]

It is rather like something which Keynes describes in one of his essays on his early moral ideas, when he felt, with his friends in Cambridge in the early part of the twentieth century, that at last, under the guidance of G. E. Moore, they knew the truth, they knew what the answer to moral questions was; they, for the first time in the history of mankind. They were the first generation to attain to this truth. The sense of 'Eureka!',[4] of having at last obtained the answer, must be extremely intoxicating. And these persons, certainly some of them, were undoubtedly under the influence of this very agreeable and beneficent feeling.

Let me now say something about the criticism of these notions, although I have dealt with them in a highly oversimplified fashion, for which I apologise. You must understand that this had not always been fully accepted by everyone. Already, in ancient Greece, certain Sophists had doubted whether universal answers of this kind were possible: 'Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est'[5] – something which holds for all men, everywhere, at all times. There is the famous Sophist that Aristotle mentions who

[3] 'Il arrivera donc ce moment où le soleil n'éclairera plus sur la terre que des hommes libres, ne reconnaissant d'autre maître que leur raison; où les tyrans et les esclaves, les prêtres et leurs stupides ou hypocrites instruments, n'existeront plus que dans l'histoire et sur les théâtres.' *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris, 1795), 338. 'Then will arrive the moment in which the sun will observe in its course free nations only, acknowledging no other master than their reason; in which tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments, will no longer exist but in history and upon the stage.' *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (London, 1795), 327.

[4] 'I have found [it]!', i.e. the answer: Archimedes' famous cry as he leapt from his bath after realising how to use the displacement of water to test for the adulteration of gold with silver, according to Vitruvius, *De architectura* (30–20 BC) 9. 10.

[5] Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* [*A Reminder*] (434 AD) 2. 3.

says, 'Fire burns both here and in Persia, but social and political customs change under our very eyes.'[6]

Montesquieu had sown certain doubts by saying there were influences of environment and of 'climate', as he called it, which were very important; that what was good for men in Persia was not necessarily good for men in France; that different institutions grew in different circumstances; that geography, tradition, various other forces – physical conformation – produced different types of human beings whose needs might be different from one another's; that total solutions imposed upon all mankind would suit some much better than others, and those whom it did not suit, it would have a Procrustean effect on.

Hume had pointed out that it was not the case that one could obtain certain guaranteed answers about matters of fact through the use of rational methods, no more about that than about moral or political values, or about any kind of answers to normative questions either; that these things were mere matters of empiricism, of probability; that you could not in fact demonstrate or prove the existence of a matter of fact by the kinds of methods which were used in logic or mathematics. All you could do was to establish certain likelihoods as a result of noticing regularities and the like. Nevertheless even these famous sceptics, who were always regarded (at least by Carl Becker in the case of Hume) as having undermined the very citadel of the *Encyclopédie*, did not in fact do so. All that follows from Montesquieu is that different means are to be used in different circumstances. Even he did not deny that most men's ends were approximately the same: all men desired to eat and drink; all men desired freedom; all men desired justice; all men desired security and the like. But of course the methods for obtaining security in China were different from those which

[6] 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.

obtained in Peru, and therefore legislation must be carefully adapted to the particular customs and the particular inclinations, particular physiques, particular moral, intellectual and perhaps religious outlooks of different groups of human beings, in order not to fail in their effect.

Hume merely translated what had been metaphysical truths about values, about what the proper ends of men were, into psychological or sociological terms. Instead of saying that certain goals were for ever given to us by God or by nature, that they could be proved to exist in the way in which the medieval Middle Ages looked upon natural law, he merely said that these values could simply be discovered by looking round at what most people in most places in fact needed, or in fact wanted, by the use of sociological and statistical methods. But neither of these thinkers denied that there was a great uniformity among men; that the goals were exceedingly similar if not identical, and the only problem was how to obtain the means of their satisfaction.

And so you get a situation in which there is a concerted attempt to translate ultimate problems – what we should be, how we should live, what we should do – into technical terms, technological terms. The ends are given. A great many people in the eighteenth century say this, both physiocrats and others. The ends are given, we are what we are, we need what we need, we want what we want. Men are created as they are and they are not very different from one age to another. Their goals are what they are and it is very possible to discover what they are by disinterested objective empirical enquiry, and not by listening to a lot of dogmatic pronouncements on the subject.

Very well. Having discovered what these ends are, the problem then is how to satisfy them, and that science will do for us – that is simply a question of how to arrange things. Condorcet more or less says, if we can study the societies of bees and beavers, why

cannot we apply the same methods to human beings?[7] That is to say, find out what they basically want, that without which they cannot flourish, that without which they cannot be happy, and try to give it to them by the best means available, namely the application of mathematical and scientific methods to nature. This is how we have done it in the past, this has been a success in the early eighteenth century, and will become a growing success as we continue to apply it.

That is the optimistic doctrine. He did not have guarantees that this would lead inexorably to total human felicity, but at least, if there was to be human felicity, that was the path towards it. And he saw no reason why, after many failures, humanity should not attain to it. That is roughly the programme, and therefore there is a notion here of progress, progress along the only route along which there is accumulation of knowledge. Mathematics – well, we know more than the ancients; physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, psychology – well, we know more than the ancients. There *are* subjects about which we do not know more than the ancients, and these are plainly not scientific, they are not worth bothering about, such as the contemporary state of, let us say, morals, the contemporary state of theology and the like, which are obviously pseudo-disciplines if only for that reason: because in them there is no knowable, rational method and no accumulation of clear, universal, easily perceptible, lucid, well-organised knowledge.

Let me now begin with the criticism of some of these doctrines. There was a good deal of scepticism about this in England one way or another, particularly in the realms of literary criticism and the like, which was a comparatively harmless marginal region; but the

[7] 'There would be no difference [between the moral and physical sciences] for a stranger to our species who would study human society as we study that of beavers or bees.' 'Discours prononcé dans l'Académie française le jeudi 21 février 1782, à la réception de M. le marquis de Condorcet' ['Speech delivered at the French Academy on Thursday 21 February 1782, at the Reception of the Marquis de Condorcet'], *Oeuvres de Condorcet* [*Works of Condorcet*], ed. A. Condorcet O'Connor and M. F. Arago (Paris, 1847–9), i 392.

central attack – the most violent attack, the most acrid, in some ways the most interesting – was delivered in Germany. Let me say something by way of a very brief historical introduction to what I am about to say. I am no historian, and I stand to be corrected on the hypothesis which I am about to offer you. It may be that what I am saying is either inaccurate or wholly untrue. If so, I hope that, after this lecture, when I shall submit myself to questioning, somebody may put me straight.

It seems to me that the Renaissance, at least the great rise in the arts and sciences which occurred in the rest of Western Europe, did not touch Germany to nearly such an extent. Why this is I do not know, nor do I know of any historian who gives any reason for this. If you travelled across Europe, from Bordeaux to Vienna, in about 1500, I think you would find that the culture of these places, the knowledge, the arts were not radically different from one another; they differed, of course, but the level was not all that different. Italy had passed its great time, but was still in a state of marvellous development; France was rising; Germany had Dürer and Grünewald and scholars like Reuchlin. It was in a high state of cultural development.

If you passed that way in about 1600, that is to say before the Thirty Years War, which was usually held to account for relative German backwardness, you would not find this at all. Spain is going through its great Renaissance; France has the Pléiade; the Elizabethan age in England I need not comment on; the Italians are producing, if not the sublime masters of the fifteenth century, at any rate great scientific progress and a very respectable form of visual art as well; music is flourishing in Italy as never before; even Denmark, Sweden are beginning to stir. But if you go to southern Germany, or even as far as the centre of the Empire, even as far as Vienna, the number of persons who are major contributors to culture are very few and far to seek. Even if you think of the seventeenth century, and if I ask you whether you think that the works of Moscherosch are superior or inferior to those of Uz, I do not know that I should expect you to give an immediate answer, unless you belong to the German department of a University.

These were the poets of this time. There is Althusius, who was a respectable political thinker; there is, I suppose, Boehme, who is an obscure mystic talking to his friends; there is Kepler, who is a lunatic living in Bohemia and Bavaria and so forth, an astrologer whose work people have become interested in much later. That is about all. Then there are perfectly respectable poets, prose writers, grammarians, and above all, of course, theologians. But the level is very different from the rest of Europe, and so it continues until we get, roughly speaking, to the time of Leibniz and beyond, when there is suddenly a great rise both in literature and above all in music. And this produces a certain sense of provincialism and even humiliation on the part of thinking Germans. The great country is France, which is top of everything. It is militarily and culturally superior to other countries in Europe. It produces scientists, it produces dramatists, it produces painters, it produces poets, it produces soldiers, it produces statesmen – of the first order. It dominates the world. The age of Louis XIV, which so excited Voltaire, was quite obviously a great age. But England, though somewhat behind, is not very far behind towards the end of that century and the beginning of the next. Nothing of this can be seen east of the Rhine.

The Germans begin by imitating these models, as always happens in the case of backward countries; and in the end, after a certain amount of feeble imitation, there is a certain resentment about this perpetual attitude of superiority and contempt for German provincials on the part of these grand Western Europeans who appear to have everything, whereas we appear to have nothing. And there is a backlash, which often happens in such cases, and it begins somewhere at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when, under the influence, perhaps, of the religious movement called pietism, there is a sense on the part of these Germans that we cannot be as poor in spirit, we cannot be as contemptible as these persons appear to think us to be. Surely we must have something? And where there is a natural, somewhat profound sense of cultural inferiority, there is as always a feeling of defensive superiority. And the opinion begins to be mooted that

no doubt they have the material goods; no doubt they have the army, they have the navy, they have the paintings, they have the sculpture, they have the buildings, they have all these great, glorious magnificent economic and political organisations. But what is all this? What is all this compared with the true values of man, which are his inner life, which are his relations to his fellow human beings and his relations to God? These are the true things, which belong to us and which we understand, and which all these superficial, glittering figures, given over to the vanities of the world, will never grasp. That which we have they cannot take away from us. The tyrant may destroy my home; one of the three hundred German Princes may laud it over us, may be as arbitrary, as unjust, as totally fanatical as you wish. They destroy my house; very well, I care nothing for houses. They destroy my family; I care nothing for my family. What matters is the purity, integrity and impregnability of my inner soul.

This is a kind of retreat in depth – what I have elsewhere called a very sublime form of sour grapes, which was bound to develop in such circumstances. This becomes particularly acute in the backward districts of Germany, in which there is an attempt to reform according to the new progressive principles of the French economy. Frederick the Great, who is a disciple of the French, who is disliked by a good many of his subjects for preferring French to German – who imports Frenchmen, who imports Maupertuis, Voltaire, La Mettrie and others into his Academy – attempts to revive the flagging industries, the flagging crafts, of East Prussia, by importing a great many Frenchmen, or by importing other craftsmen from the West for the purpose of reforming this backward province. And it is in Königsberg that you begin to have the most acute reaction against this kind of manipulation of the good, semi-feudal, deeply religious German citizens by a lot of arrogant, atheistical, smooth foreigners who look down upon us and look down upon our language, who push us about and wish to reform us and wish to stuff us into some kind of foreign frame, destroying our relations, destroying our traditional form of life in the most brutal, the most reckless and the most offensive fashion.

And this undoubtedly does create a very sharp reaction: if you read the writers of that period, of about that time, you will find a great deal of bitterness on the subject of these French lackeys imported by Frederick the Great, all these officials who arrange our lives for us. Pietism of course is a branch of Lutheranism, from which sprang Methodism in England, which is concentrated upon the inner life, which rejects ritual and rejects systematic theology in favour of a direct relationship of the soul to God; a direct relationship of the inner life of a human being to eternal values, and above all obedience to and love of spiritual truth.

The man about whom I propose to speak, namely Johann Georg Hamann, was the first secular figure to attack the Enlightenment root and branch. He did it in a very exaggerated fashion; he did it wildly. He had no profession. He started off by being a young journalist, much in love with the Enlightenment, and then he had a spiritual crisis and came back to his ancient pietist faith. But in the end he obtained a small post in the Customs Office of Königsberg and proceeded to pour out a series of writings, obscure, allusive, immensely difficult to read, full of dark anecdotes, of all kinds of references to sources which have been impossible to trace, a long series of writings which I do not recommend anyone here to read, but which nevertheless did have an effect upon their time and their generation, at least in Germany. And his central doctrine was this: They tell us over there, in France, that we must rely on reason, we must rely on experience. Take reason first. Reason, as Hume points out – he is writing in the 1760s – is incapable of demonstrating the existence of anything. Hume may have been one of *them*, he may have been a wicked atheist and a friend of Encyclopedists, but he is a Balaam who may have come to curse but has stayed to bless. He is on our side. He has proved that the great metaphysical constructions of the seventeenth century, and some of those of the early eighteenth century too, have nothing in them. You cannot demonstrate the existence of anything by pure use of reason. As Hume rightly pointed out, I should not be able to eat an egg, I should not be able to drink a glass of water, if I did not believe that these objects

existed; and my belief is not founded on anything which can be demonstrated in the way in which mathematical propositions can be demonstrated.

Well then: if belief, if faith is what gives me my world, why should not this selfsame faith give me a great many other things as well, for example, the spiritual experience in which I so profoundly believe? What can reason do against that? What can reason do against taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing? These are the only organs which bring the external world to me; these are the only things which are ultimately reliable. And if you turn to experience, what does experience show? Experience does not show a universal man about whom these Frenchmen talk. I do not know who this universal man is, I have never met him. It does not show us Man with a capital M; it shows us men and women of varying kinds who do not seek solely for happiness and the minimisation of pain, which is what the French utilitarians tell us is the basic motive of men – not at all. Men are here to eat, to drink, to love, to hate, to worship, to sacrifice, and above all to live. This is what men are like. If you really open your eyes and look at what humanity is like, you will see that the man of the French Encyclopedists is a useless fiction; that it is an attempt to construct an entirely imaginary being, the Universal Man, who never existed and never could exist. Man is above all a creature who has faculties which cannot be strictly distinguished from each other. It is only metaphysicians, only philosophers, only theorists who proceed to build up a great cobweb of abstract concepts into which they want to slice up and dissect human nature. Reason, imagination, emotion, memory, feeling, these are not different, these interpenetrate each other, they are names for attitudes; sometimes the emphasis is here, sometimes the emphasis is there. Fundamentally man is one, and not to be sliced up, not to be dissected into faculties. Indeed there are no such things as faculties: man does everything he does with all his powers, and these powers flow through each other. And if you ask yourself what men do, above all they live by images and by words. These words breed abstract concepts, and these abstract concepts are, as often as not, taken by these philosophers to be real

entities, and this is a most terrible form of delusion from which we suffer. There is no such thing as universal man; there is no such thing as universal mind; there is no such thing as reason; there is no such thing, taken abstractly, as this virtue, or that virtue, happiness, pleasure, there are only highly specific forms of it. Every human group has its own language and its own way of feeling, its own way of thinking, its own way of expressing itself, its own way of creating its images. And they live in the stream of tradition which they inherit, they are not born afresh at every moment. You cannot slough off, as the French pretend, this huge accumulation of the past which enters your veins, which is part of your very essence, in terms of which you think, in terms of which you feel, in terms of which you create your works of art, in terms of which you worship, in terms of which you sacrifice, in terms of which your whole life is lived. In other words, it is a tremendous sermon in favour of the inner spiritual life as against the material or physical life.

All truth is particular. Reason is impotent to demonstrate the existence of anything at all; all it can do is to classify. Let me quote from Hamann: 'Every court, every school, every profession, […] every sect has its own language', which we can comprehend only by the passion of 'a friend, an intimate, a lover',[8] not by rules which are master keys which open no particular door. This is the fundamental sermon. And he goes on to say that since we think in words, and since these words encapsulate the accumulated experience of the society to which we belong, the idea of cleaning up this language – for example the idea of a universal language which begins to be mooted in France – in order to get rid of all the obscurities and all the distortions which language is supposed to have bred – the idea of getting rid of this language is simply getting rid of the only instruments with which we can express ourselves, because they embody our feelings, they embody our peculiar way

[8] 'Kleeblatt Hellenistischer Briefe' ['A Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters'], First Letter (1759): Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke* [*Complete Works*], ed. Joseph Nadler (Vienna, 1949–57) (hereafter W), ii 172, line 21; 171, line 15.

of seeing the universe, they embody the particular vision by which this human group lives. The French Voltaire knows nothing, he says, about that by which men live. Men do not live by pursuit of pleasure, men do not live by reading books, men do not live by the various avocations up – by chemistry and by physics. Men live by personal relationships, and that is what matters most of all. And about this the French Encyclopedists simply got experience wrong.

There is, for example, a very typical little booklet by him, which shows the sort of man he was and the sort of thing he did. The booklet is called *Defence of the Letter H*. It is written *by* the letter H, and it is written against a lot of liberal clergymen in Berlin who want to introduce linguistic reform. One of the spelling reforms they want to introduce is to eliminate the letter H from words where it plays no part, where it is merely a nuisance, such as the letter H in German words after certain consonants, or at the ends of words and so on, where the letter is simply unnecessary. And Hamann says: Yes, yes, this is very sensible, very reasonable, very rational, all that, and after all, what is H? Nothing. Just a breath, just a tiny breath, nothing at all, inconsiderable, completely negligible. But! but! – and then it begins. But – the appearance of the letter H in certain words has etymological roots. It takes us back to our past. It shows us the formation of the language which our fathers spoke. And if we tolerate each of these formations we shall see that the universe which they saw was in some way shaped and determined by their particular symbolism, their particular words, their particular use of expressions. Yes, irregular; certainly difficult; sometimes irrational – but that is how they felt, and if they had not felt this, we should not feel this now, and if we are to understand them, we must understand all the convolutions, all the crookedness, all the peculiar complicated meandering lines which this kind of experience inevitably conveys.

If you read the Bible, you will there find that there are real characters – Abraham is real, Moses is real, these are three-dimensional characters who lived, and with whom we can have some kind of human relationship. We cannot have it towards the man of Voltaire; we cannot have it towards the formulae, the

generalisations, the scientific apparatus of the French Encyclopedists. It may be that they are very good on science; it may be that they provide us with a better material form of living – that I should not deny. It may be that they are able to predict all kinds of phenomena in the external world, but the external world is not everything. And if there are going to be efforts to reform us in accordance with the principles which these men use for the external world, they will crush, they will maim, they will destroy, they will simply rob us of our essence, which is incorporated in what we have received from others in the peculiar, in the unique, in the special, in the local.

This doctrine then gets transferred to Herder, to Möser, to Burke in England, and to many other thinkers. But Hamann is the first person to make this passionate attack. And he says: Men who believe in general propositions, men who believe in rules and formulae only, men who want to tidy things up and have a spick and span world are ultimately men who create bureaucracies, ultimately men who create tidiness, order in human affairs, ultimately destroy the individual, ultimately look on human beings as so many ciphers and so many figures in some kind of general calculation, and ignore everything which is living, everything which is real, everything which is human, everything which is responsive, the human soul itself. And this is a worse form of tyranny, in some ways, than even the dreadful horrors from which they want to save us. And therefore beware: beware of *les grands décisionnaires*,[9] as Montesquieu calls them, people who make the great decisions; of people who apply too many general propositions drawn from the alien sphere of the external world to the palpitating sphere of the human world, where everything is different, where you can understand what human beings are, what human beings want, what

[9] Apparently a conflation of Montesquieu's 'décisionnaire […] universel' ('universalist decider'), *Lettres persanes* (1721) no. 72, and Sainte-Beuve's 'grand simplificateur' ('great simplifier'), 'Franklin à Passy' (*Le Constitutionelle* [*The Constitutional*], 29 November 1852, [3c]), in C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi* [*Monday Conversations*] (Paris, 1851–62) vii 142.

human beings have been, how human beings have grown, the dark alleys through which the human race has grown to be what it is in this particular place, here in Königsberg, there in Lyon, wherever it may be – you can discover that, as he says, only by love, by some kind of empathy: by hatred, by love, by human feelings. Those are the only things that we can trust. The great theorists in their offices know nothing of this and simply want to box us in and place us on various shelves on which no human beings could, properly speaking, breathe. That is the sermon.

The sermon is directed against Frederick the Great. There is an essay called 'The Solomon of Prussia' which is directed against Frederick the Great, in which he is denounced, in very polite and rather cautious language to avoid too much censorship and too much persecution – Hamann was a Prussian citizen – for this kind of spick-and-spanness, for ordering people's lives about, for trampling on their ancient institutions. And of course East Prussia was, as I say, a semi-feudal establishment, deeply religious, where the incursion of French order and arrangements, of the new rationalisation and modernisation which Frederick the Great was so brilliant at creating, hurt most deeply.

So much for Hamann. Hamann's doctrines about the unique and the particular were passed on to his disciple Herder, who was a much more lucid and a much more famous writer. In Herder's case this took on a much more systematic form, though he is not by any means particularly systematic. Herder's point is that what the French say about men being identical – there is a fundamental human substance, the essence being identical as the essence of a stone or an animal is identical – is not true. There is not such a thing as the central core of a human being as there is a central core of, let us say, some object studied by zoologists or botanists or mineralogists: different men, different societies, different outlooks, different languages, each on its own.

If you study the Bible and understand that these are really the expressions of Judaean shepherds wandering about in the hills, you will then understand the Bible, because you must cast yourselves into what it must have been like to have been nomads of this kind,

as they were in the Bible. And this is quite different from the world of the Greeks, the world of the Greek *polis* and the world of Plato or of Aristotle or of Pericles or of Aeschylus. And this again is totally different from the world of the Norse sagas of the Skalds. He underwent a journey to England during which his ship was storm-tossed off the shores of Sweden, and he says: When you see these grim men trying to battle against the elements, and the ship practically foundering under these vast, cold waves which wash over them, then perhaps you will have a better understanding of the rhythm and the power and the force of these ancient Norse hymns, of these tremendous sagas, which express a form of life and an ideal and a view of nature which is fundamentally different from that of the early Germans, the ancient Greeks, the ancient Hebrews, the French or anybody else.

So far from there being a line of progress by which men start as primitive savages and barbarians and gradually climb through Athens, through Rome, through Florence and Paris to the heights of Voltaire's France – which is roughly speaking the sermon, at least of the proudest and most self-laudatory among the Encyclopedists, among the *philosophes* – so far from that, you will find that each of these cultures is of equal value. Greek society is neither inferior nor superior to ours; it is simply different. If you are to understand Homer, it certainly will not do to regard Homer simply as a rudimentary version of Racine; it will not do to regard Shakespeare and Milton as rather less successful examples of that of which Addison is a more successful example, which is virtually what Voltaire says.

This of course is a commonplace now, but it was not in the 1770s, when it was originally stated. If you are to understand a culture, you must understand the symbolism through which it expresses itself. Men do not all believe the same thing; men do not have identical ideals, to which some of them attain better than others; men do not create works of art which are equally to be appreciated at all times. It is not the case that it is simply a misfortune that priests and not philosophers happened to be at the cradle of mankind, as Polybius said, otherwise mankind might have

been spared all these awful horrors of religious persecution and the Inquisition. Men are what they are and they go through phases; and different men in different circumstances live different lives, have different ideals, and each culture has its own centre of gravity, its own *Schwerpunkt*, as he calls it.[10] Unless you understand what a centre of gravity is, you will not understand these men at all. The idea of translating one into the other is impossible. Hamann had already said that translation is, in principle, not possible. Every child speaks with its own native intrinsic symbolism. You can translate the similarities, but the differences remain untranslated. Somebody once defined poetry as what is lost in translation.[11] This is roughly what people like Herder and Hamann believed in – that is to say, the uniqueness of each separate culture.

If this is so, then all kinds of things follow which are certainly not compatible with the central beliefs of the Enlightenment. For example: it follows that the notion that there are true answers to all serious questions, which only wait to be discovered, and then put together for the purpose of solving the jigsaw puzzle, cannot be right, because the Greek answer to how to live is different from the Roman answer, and the Roman answer from the Indian answer, and the Indian answer from the German answer, from the Italian answer, and from the Norse answer. And these answers are of equal validity, they each suit the particular group of human beings who all answer the demands of life in their own way – and whom these answers alter: there is a perpetual self-alteration on the part of men. The idea of static ideals which remain unaltered by the fact that human beings themselves change is obviously an absurdity. Now if it is the case that there is not a single answerable question here – how to live – that the answer will differ not merely in accordance with place, as Montesquieu thought; not merely with

[10] *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* (n.p., 1774) [*Yet Another Philosophy of History*], 56.

[11] 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.

regard to the kinds of needs which will make one group of men happier rather than another group of men; if the answer differs because the very ideals of these communities are themselves different, whatever the causes may be – if that is so, then the notion of a single overarching answer towards which science will lead us if only we allow ourselves to be rational, and to be careful in our observations, cannot be true, because some of these ideals are not compatible with one another.

Herder was a benevolent thinker, an optimistic thinker, and did not see why these various different answers should not live peacefully side by side. In the garden, as Mao said, there are many flowers,[12] and there is no reason why these various flowers should not peacefully grow side by side, even though their species and their colours and their general attributes are quite different from each other. Well, be that as it may, it of course sows the seeds of a certain cultural nationalism, where you say that what matters is the language, what matters is the soil – and he says that. A man can develop only among people who use words as he uses them, by whom he is understood. If you take a German and make him emigrate to, let us say, America, to join the British troops they are fighting, he will be consumed with the most acute nostalgia; and nostalgia, the desire to return to his own country – the most noble of all pains, as he calls it[13] – is quite incurable. He cannot develop among people who do not understand what he says. They will understand his prose, but they will not understand the inner movements of his heart. If you take Icelanders and send them to Denmark, they wither. If you take Italians and send them to England, they wither; and they wither because men can develop

[12] 'Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and the sciences and a flourishing socialist culture in our land.' Mao Zedong, 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People', speech to the 11th Session of the Supreme State Conference, Beijing, 27 February 1957: *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Oxford etc., 1967–77) v 408. 'Let a hundred flowers blossom' and 'Let a hundred schools of thought contend' are Chinese proverbs.

[13] Untraced.

properly only among people who have certain characteristics which are impalpable, which these people take for granted, which create the atmosphere in which alone this plant can properly grow. He is the first person to develop this doctrine to its fullest extent. Of course, afterwards it becomes, as I say, a commonplace.

And the notion is this: the whole Encyclopedist notion that fundamentally men are similar, that what the Portuguese want, and the Chinese want, and the Italians want is much the same, although they use different means to get it – no, no, says Herder. The way in which the Portuguese draws up his laws, the way in which he sings his songs, the way in which he dances, the way in which he gets up and sits down, the way in which he eats and drinks, the kind of person he marries, the kind of religion which he professes all have a certain gestalt quality, all have a certain pattern quality, which is Portugueseness, which has more in common than the way in which the Portuguese legislate has with the way in which the Chinese do. There are certain similarities, because they are all men, of course; there are certain similarities because all men need to eat, they need to drink, they need shelter, they need certain basic things, but these basic things are not enough. There is such a thing as a pervasive cultural pattern which unites all kinds of different activities on the part of people who are members of that culture. There is no question of race here. He does not talk about blood, but he does talk about language, symbolism and soil. And that is why you must not lift people from their soil, that is why you must not exile them, and that is why you must not rob them of their language.

Hence his tremendous sermon against various forms of imperialism. Here are the Romans, who crush the native cultures of Asia, and do not know what they have crushed; whereas all these little nations of Asia, the Cappadocians, the Mysians, the Phrygians, heaven knows who, *might* have developed all kinds of exquisite cultures of their own if it were not for this enormous Roman jackboot. So with the British in India, bringing to the Indians a lot of Western Christianity unintelligible to these people. It is rather peculiar that the chief clergyman of Weimar, which is what Herder

theoretically was, protests against missionaries' activity in India because they trample on ancient Indian religious values. But he does. Similarly with everything else of that kind. Any form of imperialism, any form of flattening out, any form of destroying the natural life of peoples in the name of some overarching general principle, impoverishes, maims, destroys, creates a desert where there were blooming flowers before. That is the central sermon.

That is one form of criticism of the Enlightenment; that is why Herder thinks that Voltaire, Helvétius, all these men do not understand what men are. They appeal to experience, but the experience to which they appeal has already been processed by all kinds of philosophical and scientific generalisations which have denuded them of their peculiar colour, of their particularity, of their applicability to specific human circumstances everywhere.

There are two other persons whom I wish to mention, who delivered an attack from a somewhat different quarter. Of all people, the philosopher Kant, who was certainly a child of the Enlightenment, who certainly believed in the triumph of science – and indeed the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a great attempt to explain the principles upon which the natural sciences stand – no man believed in reason more strongly; no man believed more in order, no man believed more in coherent, lucid and systematic thought. When it came, however, to the subject of morals, as everyone here probably knows, Kant believed that the only act of merit which human beings could perform is the act which they perform freely; that is, acts which they need not have performed, but determined themselves to perform. And therefore he believed that the notions of right and wrong applied only to those acts which men did themselves, where they acted freely and were not acted upon. Now Helvétius, when he writes about the reorganisation of the horrible human society from which he came, of the awful France of corruption, privilege and injustice which he is trying to remedy, says it is no good preaching to people, because we have preached for two thousand years and it has made no difference. The only thing to do is to legislate. What we shall do is to organise a great series of rewards and punishments so that people who do what is

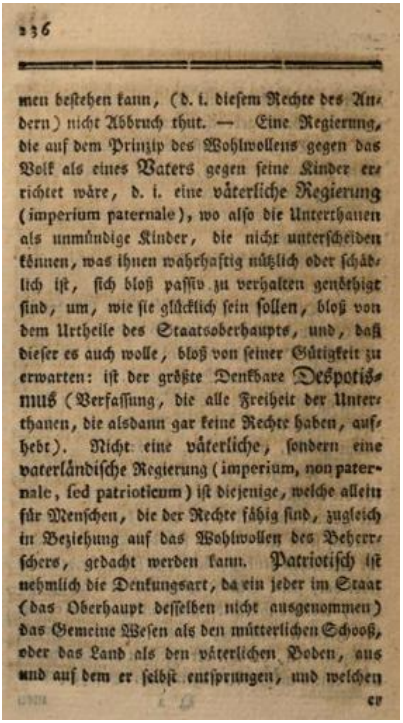
wrong will, as it were, get an electric shock – though he did not of course use that expression – anyhow, will be punished; whereas people who do what is right will automatically be rewarded. 'I do not care', he says, 'whether men be virtuous or vicious, I want them only to be intelligent';[14] and if they are intelligent they will simply do what is good because I shall dangle a carrot, and they will avoid what is bad because I shall use a stick. This is how society must be reformed. They must be conditioned into socially productive activity; their children still must be conditioned; their grandchildren will have it in their blood – their grandchildren will already do it more or less semi-automatically. In this way a peaceful, harmonious and rational society can be created.

This for Kant is absolute blasphemy. The idea of compelling people, the idea of conditioning people, the idea of educating people by forcible means, by herding them, using them, conditioning them like animals into performing certain kinds of acts – this appeared to him to be an attempt against the inborn dignity and freedom of man. In his work 'Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis' – 'On the Common Saying: That May Be Right in Theory, But it Won't Work in Practice' – he says that nothing is more terrible than paternalism.[15] There are a great many vices which Kant disliked much more, perhaps; no doubt he did not like cruelty, he did not like mendacity; there are all kinds of things Kant was no doubt against. But his most savage attack is against wise paternalism, by which the ruler manages to herd his people like sheep into the right kind of meadow, because that means treating them like children, like people who are not responsible for their acts; he is depriving them of their freedom, their freedom to be vicious if necessary. Better to go to the bad freely than to have to go to the good

[14] 'Peu importe que les hommes soient vicieux; c'en est assez s'ils sont éclairés' ('It doesn't matter if people are vicious; it's enough that they are intelligent/enlightened'). *De l'homme* [*On Man*] 9. 6.

[15] Paternalism 'is the greatest *despotism* imaginable'. *Berlinische Monatsschrift* [*Berlin Monthly*] 22 (July–December 1793), 236.

because of some kind of compulsion exercised upon you, either by educators, or by legislators, or by your emotions, which you are unable to control. Hence this terrific passion for the idea of the free will in Kant, almost a paranoiac fear that one might be conditioned by factors which prevent the free exercise of at least minimal choice.



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men bestehen kann, (d. i. diesem Rechte des Andern) nicht Abbruch thut. — Eine Regierung, die auf dem Prinzip des Wohlwollens gegen das Volk als eines Vaters gegen seine Kinder errichtet wäre, d. i. eine väterliche Regierung (imperium paternale), wo also die Unterthanen als unmündige Kinder, die nicht unterscheiden können, was ihnen wahrhaftig nützlich oder schädlich ist, sich bloß passiv zu verhalten genöthigt sind, um, wie sie glücklich sein sollen, bloß von dem Urtheile des Staatsoberhaupts, und, daß dieser es auch wolle, bloß von seiner Gütigkeit zu erwarten: ist der größte Denkbare Despotismus (Verfassung, die alle Freiheit der Unterthanen, die alsdann gar keine Rechte haben, aufhebt). Nicht eine väterliche, sondern eine vaterländische Regierung (imperium, non paternale, sed patrioticum) ist diejenige, welche allein für Menschen, die der Rechte fähig sind, zugleich in Beziehung auf das Wohlwollen des Beherrschers, gedacht werden kann. Patriotisch ist nehmlich die Denkungsart, da ein jeder im Staat (das Oberhaupt desselben nicht ausgenommen) das Gemeine Wesen als den mütterlichen Schooß, oder das Land als den väterlichen Boden, aus und auf dem er selbst entsprungen, und welchen

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Kant: Paternalism 'is the greatest despotism *imaginable'*

And his attitude to nature is wildly different from that of the Encyclopedists. For the Encyclopedists, for Hume, for Rousseau, equally for the others, nature is a great system, either organic or mechanical, whichever way you like to look at it, which operates in some ideal fashion – by cause and effect, or by organic development according to Maupertuis, or whatever it might be.

Men are unhappy only when they fall out of harmony with nature, and the important thing is to adjust oneself, to re-enter into healthy relations with nature, towards which men's whole being incites them, and not listen to the wicked words of wicked men or silly remarks of stupid men.

For Kant this will not do at all. Nature is the sphere of causality, that is, a treadmill.[16] If men are objects in nature, goodbye to morality, men cannot possibly be men; men in this regard must not be equated with animals or things. Nature for him is not kind nature, not Mistress Nature, not Dame Nature, which it is for the thinkers of the eighteenth century. Nature is at best simply a slagheap, just a lot of neutral matter upon which we impose our free will, and create as we want to create, or in accordance with principles – rational principles to which we commit ourselves. Alternatively, nature is perhaps even a hostile element which resists us, which wants to reduce us to mere causal sequences, which wants to beat us into natural pulp, and to make us equal with animals and plants, and therefore must on all accounts be resisted. As for the talk about self-determination, no good, he says. To talk about a clock which, because it goes round, appears to itself to be running itself is a mere illusion: self-determination, the idea that our character dominates us, although we have not made our character because that has been made by external forces, is a 'miserable subterfuge'.[17]

Now Kant, in short, as I say, was addicted to reason; he hated sentimentality and Romanticism, *Schwärmerei*,[18] almost more than anyone. Nevertheless this constant emphasis on autonomy, as he called it, on self-direction, on being able to choose freely outside

[16] IB may be thinking of Kant's disparaging description of freedom conceived in terms of natural law as 'the freedom of a turnspit, which, once wound up, performs its movements automatically': *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [*Critique of Practical Reason*] (Riga, 1788), part 1, book 1, chapter 3, [subsection] 'Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason': *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* [*Kant's Collected Works*] (1900–) v 97, line 19.

[17] 'Elender Behelf' ('miserable expedient'): ibid. 96, line 15.

[18] 'Rapture'.

the causal treadmill, then communicated itself to certain German Romantic philosophers, who vastly exaggerated it. In Fichte you will find these constant references to the fact that the self is free, values are not imposed upon me from outside, I create them myself. Here you begin getting the Romantic doctrine which is athwart the whole of the rationalism and empiricism of the eighteenth century, which is to say, what I do is something which I invent myself. It is not true that there are objective values like stars in the heavens which I discover by some kind of quasi-scientific means. Like a painter, before I have painted my picture, it is not there at all. Reynolds was wrong in supposing that there are Platonic archetypes which I simply copy. Before I have danced, there is no dance; before I have walked, there is no walk; before I have performed the moral act, there never was a principle. The principle is a principle which I myself invent for myself. Of course, much depends upon how you define the self. Some define the self empirically, as, for example, Romantics like, let us say, Byron or Carlyle did, and some identify the self as the nation, the class, the culture, history, whatever it might be. But in all these cases the notion is: No act is worth performing unless it is freely chosen; if it is freely chosen, it is not part of causal nature; if it is not part of causal nature, science cannot deal with it. And this is not compatible with the doctrine of man as an intrinsic part of nature, as taught by virtually every thinker in the eighteenth century.

Let me end with the most violent attack of all on the Enlightenment – that is, after the French Revolution. The French Revolution was built upon the principles of the Enlightenment, and they went wrong: it was not the rule of wise experts; it was not the rule of honourable scientists seeking to determine themselves in terms of reason. The French Revolution brought forward the notions of the Terror, uncontrolled mobs, charisma, dictators – the very opposite of that which these people preached. If there were scientists of genius like Lavoisier, they put them to death; if there were thinkers of great nobility like Condorcet, they forced them to die also; and therefore there was a great question, always: What went wrong? Why did the French Revolution, which started so

nobly, inspired by so many high-minded persons and so many careful, scrupulous scientific thinkers, why did it end in this great bloodbath, and in Napoleon?

Well, there are many answers, such as the fact that the revolutionaries, the thinkers, had not taken enough account of economic factors or of religious factors, or of this or that factor. The reactionary thinker Joseph de Maistre, who was a Savoyard, whose country was conquered by the French and who therefore crossed over to the Whites, so to speak, simply takes the Encyclopedists at their word and says: They say we must be empirical; they say we must watch man as he truly is in nature. Nature: very well, he says, let us look at nature. What do we find? They speak of a harmonious nature, Dame Nature, Mistress Nature, this exquisite lady in Hume who, when you are out of sorts, gradually brings you back to yourself. I do not see this, says Maistre. I study nature in books on zoology, and what I find nature to be is a huge bloody field of slaughter in which animals destroy each other and man destroys himself. That is what I find. I find man to be aggressive, and I find man to be ignorant, and I find man to be irrational. The idea of controlling man by rational institutions invented by theoretical thinkers is simply not on. Take, he says, the institutions of mankind. Take, for example, the institution of marriage: is that rational? Why should I suppose that life with one lady to whom I plight my troth is going to make me happy for the rest of my life? A most improbable idea. Nevertheless, free love, wherever it is applied, collapses. Marriage has lasted for a very long time. Take the institution of monarchy. Nothing is less rational than to suppose that, even if the King is good and wise, his son, grandson, great-grandson will also be good and wise. A great many of them have been stupid, vicious and wicked. Yet the number of republics has not been great and the number of monarchies, very. The Polish *liberum veto*, which is perhaps the most rational political institution ever invented, collapsed ignominiously not so very long ago.

He then says: What do these gentlemen wish us to see? They wish to study what mankind is actually like. Well, I am doing so,

and let me inform you that what I see is this: I see that man is by nature irrational and aggressive. Small reforms, they resist. If Peter the Great wants to shave the beards of the Boyars, some of them resist to the death. If somebody wants to reform the calendar (as happened in the middle of the eighteenth century), people will organise riots on the streets because they think that certain days are being stolen from their lives. But when men are sent to fight with each other – innocent men – to fight, to shed innocent blood of equally innocent men on the other side, then they do not mutiny. Nothing suits men better than to be invited to immolate themselves upon some ridiculous altar. Then they throw themselves with enthusiasm upon each other, and march and conquer and kill and slaughter without the slightest reason for knowing why they are doing so. That is what man is really like. If that is what man is like, it is no use applying rational schemas to him. The best we can do is to try to control him, the best we can do is to prevent him from destroying his fellow men. Original sin is not to be denied. Rousseau says: How is it that man, who is born free, is nevertheless everywhere in chains? That, says Maistre, is rather as if you were to say: Why is it that sheep, who are born carnivorous, nevertheless everywhere nibble grass?[19] We must observe men as they are, and not as we think and imagine them to be.

As for language: how did language grow? M. Condillac, who can answer all questions, can answer this question too. The first generation of men said 'BA' and the second generation of men said 'BE'. The Assyrians invented the nominative and the Medes invented the genitive.[20] Is that how it happened? All this mockery is intended to show that institutions grow imperceptibly. Much of it is simply rhetorical exaggeration, and half of the faults which he attributes to the Encyclopedists, the Encyclopedists are completely

[19] This is in fact a remark on Maistre by Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle* [*Political and Moral Thinkers of the Nineteenth Century*], 1st series (Paris, 1899), 41.

[20] *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* [*The St Petersburg Dialogues*] (Paris, 1821), Dialogue 2, *Oeuvres complètes de J. de Maistre* [*Complete Works of J. de Maistre*] (Lyon, 1884–7), iv 88.

innocent of. The main value of all these criticisms is to show that the men whom the Encyclopedists talked about were a good deal more complex, and the issues were much more tangled, that the whole of the appalling 'hell journey',[21] as Hamann calls it, of self-understanding is fraught with a great many more difficulties than had been supposed in the palmy and optimistic days of the simpler minds among the progressive Encyclopedists. And this has entered the nineteenth century very deeply. Among Maistre's pupils you will find a great many thinkers; you will find Kierkegaard, you will find Dostoevsky, you will find Nietzsche, you will find all these thinkers who, one-sided, savagely irrational and sometimes almost mad as they may be, nevertheless see things which others have not seen. That is what Hamann originally said. If you want the truth, do not confine yourself to the conventional men who look at everything through nicely polished spectacles. It is the irregulars, vagabonds, outsiders – persons afflicted with all kinds of slight dottinesses, people who squint at reality and do not look it straight in the eye – who sometimes see things which all these gifted, well-ordered, intelligent, wise, academically trained people do not see.

That is about as much as is left of the heritage of these thinkers, but perhaps, in its own way, it is enough.

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Last revised 25 November 2025

[21] 'Höllenfahrt' ('Descent into Hell'): 'Chimärische Einfälle über den zehnten Theil der Briefe die Neueste Litteratur betreffend' ['Chimerical Ideas about the Tenth Part of the Letters concerning the Latest Literature'], W ii 164, line 18.

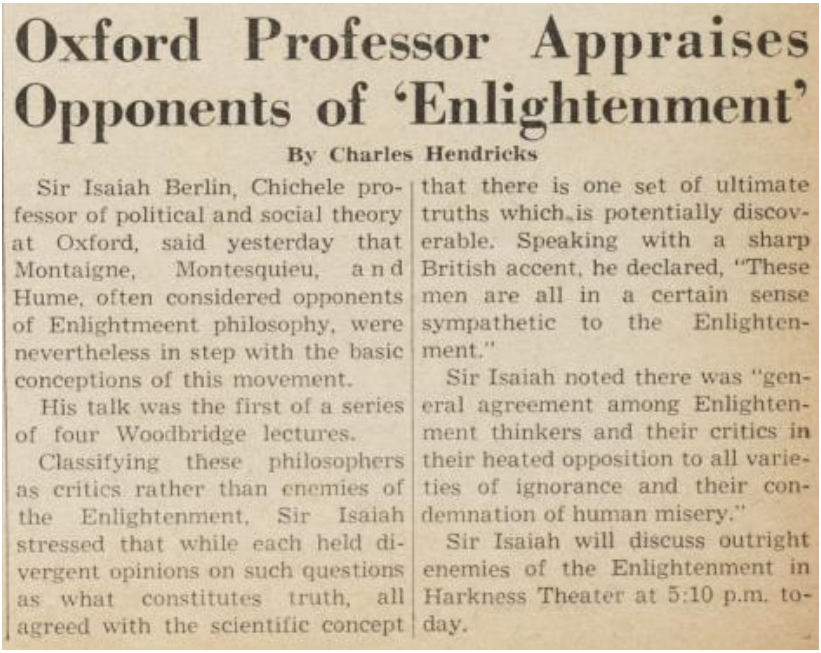
Two Enemies of the Enlightenment

IB delivered four Woodbridge Lectures on 'Two Enemies of the Enlightenment' (Hamann and Maistre) on 25–8 October 1965 in the Harkness Academic Theater, Nicholas Murray Butler Library, on Columbia University's Morningside Heights campus. The first and last lectures are apparently lost, but brief notices of them both were published in the student newspaper, the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, and appear below in their proper positions. The press release for the series, dated 19 October 1965, explains the name of the lectures:

> The Woodbridge Lectures memorialize the late Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge, distinguished dean and professor of Philosophy at Columbia. Professor Woodbridge, who died in 1940, left a bequest to Columbia for the purpose of bringing eminent philosophers to the campus and to support publication of their lectures by the Columbia University Press. Substantial contributions by friends made it possible for the University to establish the Woodbridge Memorial Fund for the endowment of a special lectureship in philosophy.

Frederick Woodbridge

1 The Scientific Ideal of the French Enlightenment
Early Heretics and Doubters



Oxford Professor Appraises Opponents of 'Enlightenment'

By Charles Hendricks

Sir Isaiah Berlin, Chichele professor of political and social theory at Oxford, said yesterday that Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Hume, often considered opponents of Enlightmeent philosophy, were nevertheless in step with the basic conceptions of this movement.

His talk was the first of a series of four Woodbridge lectures.

Classifying these philosophers as critics rather than enemies of the Enlightenment, Sir Isaiah stressed that while each held divergent opinions on such questions as what constitutes truth, all agreed with the scientific concept that there is one set of ultimate truths which is potentially discoverable. Speaking with a sharp British accent, he declared, "These men are all in a certain sense sympathetic to the Enlightenment."

Sir Isaiah noted there was "general agreement among Enlightenment thinkers and their critics in their heated opposition to all varieties of ignorance and their condemnation of human misery."

Sir Isaiah will discuss outright enemies of the Enlightenment in Harkness Theater at 5:10 p.m. today.

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Columbia Daily Spectator, 26 October 1965, 1

2 The First Onslaught
J. G. Hamann and his Disciples

Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88)

Before I begin properly I ought to say that I undertook to answer questions at the end of today's lecture. I hope that I shall stop at about [*inaudible*], and if I do that, then perhaps we might have an interval of two or three minutes, in the course of which those who neither wish to ask questions nor wish to hear others do so can perhaps conveniently leave without attracting undue attention to themselves.

*

I SPOKE LAST TIME about Hamann's anti-rationalism. Let me continue with the exposition of his views, so as to give you a more complete picture than I was able to do last time.

The word 'reason' itself profoundly irritated and annoyed him: whenever he sees it he strikes. Bayle made the famous statement, which is the battle-cry of the entire Enlightenment, 'Reason is the supreme tribunal, and one which judges in the last resort, and without appeal, everything that is placed before it.'[22] That comes from the famous essay on the comet. Hamann quotes this and says, 'What is this *reason*, with its universality, infallibility, exuberant certainty and obviousness? An *ens rationis*, a stuffed dummy which the *howling* superstition of unreason endows with *divine attributes*.'[23] This is a very typical way of speaking – for him, that is to say. What he wishes to say is that any form of reification, any form of the erection of any category as a general criterion for any purpose always distorts and caricatures. As I tried to say last time, he is the first of the thinkers, at least I think he is the first – it's always rather dangerous to say this, but he is at least amongst the first of thinkers – who start the entire tradition of saying: Any smoothing out, any generalisation is a caricature of the living tissue of life; death cannot copy life; rest cannot copy movement; words cannot copy reality; and so forth. Whenever the word 'reason' comes up in the writings of anyone else he sees before him a dead framework, an icy construction which appears to him to imprison and to kill the flowing chaos of life which he sees before him. To resist emotion with logical distinctions is to try to stop the ocean wave with a barrier of sand. Mathematics have never yet curbed passion or done anything to resist or restrain human prejudice. And he quotes Hume again.[24] The points I wish to make – there are three points – in order to condense this man's extremely chaotic and often wildly irrelevant thought into what appear to me to be the central propositions – at least of historical importance – let me say this.

[22] *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jesus-Chri[s]t: Contrain-les d'entrer* ['Philosophical Commentary on These Words of Jesus Christ: Compel Them to Come In'] ('Cantorbury', 1686), part 1, chapter 1, 7.

[23] 'Κογξομπαξ' ('Konxompax') (1779), W iii 225.3–6.

[24] Presumably a reference to a quotation by Hamann from Hume mentioned in the lost first lecture.

The first proposition which I wish to impute to him is that he genuinely was a nominalist and an empiricist. That is to say, whenever he saw rationalism before him in any shape or form he attacked immediately. The second proposition is about the unity of the spirit and the flesh. The third proposition is about the nature of language. He pictures the history of philosophy as a dead museum of forgotten antiquities in which it is necessary to infuse the breath of life in order to make them live; and when you come to the history of philosophy, what you mainly find there, according to him, are various forms of repression, various forms of frameworks, networks of categories, constructions of the reason, with which human beings try to shield and protect themselves against perception of reality. The true image, he says, of the average man, the sane, sensible or rational man, is that of a sleepwalker, 'a man who with infinite sagacity, reflection, coherence, talks, acts, executes perilous enterprises, and does this with greater assurance of touch than he would – or could – do it if his eyes were even a little open'.[25]

This is a paradox which almost every other Romantic author afterwards echoes. The notion is that sensible men and even sensible philosophers manage to lull themselves into some rigid view of life, construct some highly artificial schema by which they imprison themselves, go to sleep on a comfortable bed of an accepted and unquestioned dogma, and thenceforward, having dedicated themselves to some single *idée maîtresse*,[26] to some single framework or some single so-called coherent view of life, proceed then to ignore everything which is exceptional, everything that is real, everything that is palpitating, everything which contradicts, all the wrinkles, all the chaos, all the irregularities of life, which to Hamann are in fact reality. And he says: 'Four things I have never understood: the man who seeks the philosophers' stone; the man who wishes to square the circle; the man who wishes to measure

[25] Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel* [*Correspondence*], ed. Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, 1955–79) (hereafter B) i 369.31–4.

[26] 'Master idea'.

the sea; and the man who believes that a man of genius ought to possess common sense.'[27] And as he was convinced that he himself was a man of genius, and compared himself to Socrates in this respect, not altogether modestly, his life was to a large degree devoted to constantly, wherever he saw it, refuting this constant tendency towards the imprisonment of reality in some categorial scheme. He says: There are two types of idolatry to which human beings are addicted. One he calls rational mysticism, the other he calls scientific mysticism. Rational mysticism, which is a curious name for it, is for example the Eleusinian mysteries. The Eleusinian mysteries are an attempt to create the illusion on people's part that there is another world to which they can be admitted by incantations, by religious exercises, by mysterious operations by which they escape from the chaos and the unsatisfactoriness of this world into some coherent, luminous divine world in which virtue is rewarded, crime is punished and otherwise order occurs, which compensates them for the dissatisfactions and the irregularities of this world.

This is a form of ancient idolatry. Modern idolatry, he says, is a much paler and much more – even foolish, a far less vivid version of this same thing, and that is created by the scientists of Paris. There is the religion of science and the religion of Eleusis: both these are forms of idolatry, both these are an attempt to erect a dualism by which the world here below is ignored in favour of some imaginary world thereabove or therebehind or therebelow. Any form of dualism of this sort appears to him to be an offence against the sense of reality. Anything which is ordered, anything which is finite, he seeks to reject. I think it was Spinoza who said: The purpose of nature is uniformity. There is nothing that Hamann believed less. He liked only diversity, he liked only infinity; anything which appeared to him to be finite or tend toward the finite, any ambition to try to lock anything up within a coherent

[27] More literally: 'Three things […] I cannot comprehend, possibly four: a *man of sound judgement* who looks for the philosopher's stone; the squaring of a circle; the extent of the sea; and a *man of genius* who *affects the religion of sound human reason*.' 'Glose Philippique' ['Philippic Gloss'], W ii 294.6–11.

schema, appeared to him a form of shallowness and foolishness. That is why – he tells the story himself, how, sitting in the garden of the English merchant Green, who was a great friend of Immanuel Kant – sitting in this garden, Kant said, 'I think' – not perhaps one of the wisest remarks which Kant made, as you will see – 'I think that astronomy has finally come to an end, I think everything is known, I don't think new knowledge can now occur.' If Kant did say that, as I say, it was not perhaps the most gifted remark of his.

Hamann said, 'When he said this, I could strangle him.'[28] His reason was – Hamann's interest in astronomy was not superabundant; he was not interested in natural sciences, as we know; on the contrary, he regarded the whole notion of the natural sciences as *Lebensfeindlich* – inimical to life. Nevertheless the very idea that something is finished, that God couldn't create new stars, new planets, that enormous exceptions couldn't arise, that some enormous outburst of chaotic creative imagination on the part of an unpredictable creator could not occur, that Kant or any other scientist was able with what appeared to him to be smug satisfaction to say, that's that, we've done the job, astronomy is at an end, now we get on to the next task, whatever it is, the next set of problems in the natural sciences, appeared to him to be the most profound misunderstanding and the most limitless arrogance of which contemptible human beings were capable. This is the temper in which he speaks. Similarly, whenever he finds any generalisations, whenever he finds Kant talking about categories – about, for example, causality, we already know what he thinks – but when he

[28] Hamann to J. G. Herder, 23 May 1768, B ii 416.30–35. IB's account of this episode is apparently based on Jean Blum's in *La Vie et l'oeuvre de J.-G. Hamann, le 'Mage du Nord', 1730–1788* [*The Life and Work of J. G. Hamann, the 'Magus of the North', 1730–88*] (Paris, 1912), 283–4: Blum reports that Hamann wanted to strangle (Blum's word, not Hamann's) the new hypotheses of astronomy (not Kant himself); moreover, Hamann's letter refers to Green's house, not his garden, and says that he heard Kant speak of the state of astronomy in a daydream (not in person), and found himself so hostile to these hypotheses that he was after their lives.

finds Kant talking about Time and Space with capital letters as forms of the intuition, he says: Time is to me pulse beats, time is to me heartbeats, the rhythms of nature, concretely, here; there is no such thing as Time, he says, with a capital T, there is only this particular piece of duration, there is this particular experience which is ungeneralisable because sufficiently dissimilar to other similar experiences for any general proposition about time not to be of great significance. Similarly space is what I feel when I gesture; space is what I feel when I make a piece of sculpture; space occurs when I try to mimic the walk of an animal, a form of gait for example. As for you the three-dimensional space of which Newton speaks, the box of which Newton and Kant speak, that is a typical fiction of reason which again imprisons and limits the imagination of man.

The philosophical value of this is not very clear, but at any rate it is a symptom of the way in which Hamann's thought and imagination worked. Anything which represses was inimical to him; even Rousseau, for whom he has some respect – he looks on Rousseau, and he says he looks on Rousseau, very much as Socrates looked on Protagoras, as the best of the sophists, but still a sophist. And he is the best of the sophists, just as Protagoras was for Socrates, because Protagoras understood something about the moral nature of man, though he didn't understand it, perhaps, in the way in which Socrates wished it understood. Rousseau is an excellent weapon against the shallow generalisations of Helvétius or Holbach; he understands the human emotions, he understands the darker side of human nature, which is completely opaque to the, for Hamann at least, dry unimaginative schematising dryasdusts who work in Paris, or for that matter in England too.

But Rousseau is mistaken because for one yoke he simply substitutes another: for the yoke of sociology, psychology, some kind of science of man – of human science or social science which is constructed on the analogy of mathematics or of natural science, which kills everything, smooths and irons everything out, he substitutes the simple man, the open heart, innocence, which nevertheless is also able to perceive some kind of general laws,

some kind of huge timeless propositions, which all good men at any period, at any time and in any place, could see if only they weren't corrupted by their own *amour propre* or by the devastating or crippling effect upon them of institutions which perhaps they weren't able to help being born into. And this seems to Hamann to be ultimately a deep fallacy. And that is why he attacks the *Nouvelle Héloïse*: he likes the *Nouvelle Héloïse* as a novel because it appears to him to some degree to show some perception of the Romantic, that is to say the emotional, nature of man, the miseries – it is in some ways a description of a specific psychological tragedy, of the pains and agonies of a particular human being in a particular concrete situation – and not to generalise too much. Nevertheless he says: There is absolutely no reason in the world why the heroine, why Julie, should in the end not go off with Saint-Preux. Why should she remain with her dreary boring husband Wollmar just because he is virtuous, and just because he understands nature, and understands the nature of the world? He understands nothing of the kind, he says. The morality of Rousseau, which is ultimately the conventional morality of Protestantism, for Hamann, is simply the imposition once again of fearful thongs, a fearful conventional framework, upon the wild beatings of the human heart; and therefore his criticism of this novel is that in the end Rousseau surrendered; in the end there is the gloomy trio of Wollmar, Julie and Saint-Preux; Saint-Preux is unable to marry Julie because she is already married to Wollmar; marriage is sacred.

Why should marriage be sacred? says Hamann. This needs some reasoning; and he himself never did marry the lady with whom he lived. This caused a certain amount of shock in pietist circles; nevertheless his general piety was so great, and the general holiness of his life was regarded as so exceptional, that he was not very much attacked on that score. But the general attitude of Hamann in this respect is that it is we human beings who impose barriers between the various aspects of human nature, between the reason and the imagination, between the imagination and sense, between sense and understanding – all these categories with which he thinks

Kant plays so idly, into which he hacks and cuts the living flesh of reality. All this does incredible damage in life itself. And one of the most powerful sermons to be obtained in Hamann is about the identification of the spirit and the flesh, that they are one, and that the ascetic cutting off of the spirit from the flesh, whether it is done by people who believe in the Eleusinian mysteries, or whether it is done by ascetics who follow either Jansenists or German pietists, whoever it might be, is a crime against the complete nature of man.

Let me read you some characteristic quotations to illustrate this point. The greatest crime, death in life, is to divorce the intellect from 'the deep abyss of the most tangible sensuousness'.[29] 'Let there be light!'[30] This is an act of creation, sensuous drawing and creation. God himself is made flesh. If God had not been made flesh he could not discourse to us, who are also flesh; but we, blasphemously, have divided the spirit from the flesh. Gather the fragments together: that is the work, in literature, of a scholar; in thought, of a philosopher; but to imitate them, to shape them and to live them, that is the work of a poet;[31] and the poet is the highest manifestation, for Hamann, of man. Reason is a poisonous snake,[32] the arch-heretic, the great enemy of God and his truth, the snake in Paradise. To divide the flesh from the spirit is blasphemy against God, who made us one. We must take Christ's words literally and seek to restore within ourselves a child's view of life, and a child's view of life mainly includes a natural, unashamed sense of the flesh. To tame the passions is to weaken spontaneity and genius.

This was a fairly commonplace sentiment for the eighteenth century, and Diderot would have subscribed to it, the Swiss aestheticians would have subscribed to it, but Hamann meant it in

[29] 'Metakritik über den Purism der Vernunft' ['Metacritique of the Purism of Reason'] (1784), W iii 287.31.

[30] 'Aesthetica in nuce' ['Aesthetics in a Nutshell'] (1762), W ii 197.26.

[31] ibid. 199.2–3.

[32] In this view he followed the pietist Johann Konrad Dippel (1673–1734), author as 'Christianus Democritus' of *Christen-Statt auff Erden ohne gewöhnlichen Lehr- Wehr- und Nehr-Stand* [*The Christian City on Earth without the Usual Educational, Military and Pastoral Professions*] (n.p., 1700), e.g. pp. 18, 78–9, 111.

a much more passionate and much more direct sense. Our philosophers hide with shame, like Adam, their unavoidable and agreeable sin;[33] as man was made in God's image, so is the body a picture of the soul. Modern writers, he says, have turned the savage violence of the Beasts of the Apocalypse into Lessing's harmless moral imagery; they have turned Aesop's ferocious vision into the smooth elegance of Horace. To understand truly one must descend to the depths of the orgies of Bacchus and Ceres.[34] Newton's, Buffon's and Nieuwentyt's discoveries cannot inspire poetry as mythology has only too obviously done.[35] The reason for this is that nature has been killed by the rationalists because they do not understand senses, passions, man. 'Passion alone gives abstractions and hypotheses hands, feet, wings; images it endows with spirit, life, language. […] Where [in science] do we find the rolling thunder of eloquence, or […] the monosyllabic brevity of lightning?'[36]

For this we must go to artists, for this we cannot go to the modern philosopher; we can go to the Bible, we can go to Luther, but not to the Greeks; to Milton, not to modern French versifiers. Why are the glorious organs of generation objects of shame? Do not speak of general human sentiment on this subject; this isn't true: '*children* are not full of shame, nor are *savages* filled with shame, nor are the Cynic philosophers'.[37] *Pudeur* is an inherited piece of morality – a habit, due to consensus. By 'consensus' he means middle-class sentiment, against the Bible, against God, against thunder. 'If the feelings are mere *pudenda*, do they therefore cease to be the tools of virility?' he says.[38] 'The *pudenda* of our organism are so closely wedded to the secret depths of our *heart* and *brain*

[33] 'Zweifel und Einfälle über eine vermischte Nachricht' ['Doubts and Ideas about a Mixed Message'] (1776), W iii 190.23–6.

[34] 'Aesthetica in nuce' (note 30), W ii 201.4–15.

[35] ibid. 205.21–3.

[36] ibid. 208.20–4; 'monosyllabic' because the German for lightning is 'Blitz'.

[37] 'Versuch einer Sybille über die Ehe' ['A Sibyl's Essay on Marriage'] (1775), W iii 199.28.

[38] 'Aesthetica in nuce' (note 30), W ii 208.11–12.

that a total rupture of this natural union is impossible.'[39] Reason is identified by him with repression, not altogether unlike Blake. 'I have always sought to identify and pick out the *inferna* of a torso, rather than the *superna* of a bust,' he wrote to Herder in 1768. 'And my coarse imagination has never been able to picture a creative spirit without *genitalia*.'[40]

Let me quote to you remarks which Blake made on this subject, which parallel this. When Blake says, for example, that men 'form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them / The eternal laws of God',[41] this is a very, very Hamannian sentiment indeed.

> Children of the future Age,
> Reading this indignant page;
> Know that in a former time,
> Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime.[42]

This could almost be paralleled in a good many of Hamann's writings.

> That they may call a shame & sin
> Loves Temple that God dwelleth in
> […]
> And render that a Lawless thing
> On which the Soul Expands its wing.[43]

This is almost parallel. It's true, you could say that both in the case of Blake and in the case of Hamann, there is a common mystical tradition, in the case of Blake Swedenborg, in the case of Hamann very similar thinkers in Germany, who, as often in the writings of mystics, use sensuous and sexual imagery for all kinds of mystical

[39] Hamann to Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 24 July 1784, B v 167.16–18.

[40] Hamann to Herder, 23 May 1768, B ii 415.19–24.

[41] *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), plate 28, lines 6–7: *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr (Oxford, 1978) (hereafter Bentley), i 282.

[42] *Songs of Experience*, plate 51 ('A Little GIRL Lost'), lines 1-4, Bentley i 196.

[43] 'The Everlasting Gospel', p. 50, Bentley ii 1060.

religious emotions. Hamann certainly belonged to this company, but he translated it into secular language, and he was one of the greatest defenders of spontaneous or natural behaviour, certainly in his day, whereby he did duly shock respectable persons. For example, on the frontispiece of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, of his first important intellectual essay, he represents himself as the goat-footed god Pan. And this caused a certain amount of surprise and even shock in the more staid circles in Königsberg. The *beaux esprits* for whom the French are writing would never see the dawn of the rising day, for they do not believe in the resurrection of the flesh. How can fastidious modern connoisseurs do anything, since they are ashamed of nature, cover her up, concern themselves only with the pretty clothes with which they hide her?

And then he says: 'Rules are the vestal virgins who populated Rome, thanks to the exceptions which they perpetrated.'[44] This is a very typical Hamannian joke. Fig trees, he says, which provide us very usefully with leaves to cover our shame, nevertheless feed us only by allowing their fruit to drop. Using these kinds of images, particularly about the vestal virgins, conveys a very typical Hamann sentiment because the proposition is: Rules are important, but it is also important to break them; the rules exist for the purpose of being broken in exceptional cases. Anything which pretends to have any degree of universal validity is a human fiction invented to constrict the spirit; and there is perpetual propaganda in Hamann against repression in all its forms, anything which imprisons the living spirit, whether in the form of philosophical construction or in the form of political organisation or in the form of language.

Let me come to his linguistic theory, which is simply another illustration of this selfsame thesis. The origins of language were a very lively subject in the middle of the eighteenth century. All kinds of theories developed about the origins of language: all kinds of rival views were expressed about whether language was in fact an invention – a gadget, like the wheel, for example, or the screw,

[44] 'Leser und Kunstrichter' ['Reader and Art Critic'], W ii 345.11–12. Romulus and Remus were the children by Mars of Rhea Silvia, a Vestal Virgin.

which human beings invented for certain purposes – or whether, on the contrary, it was a gift bestowed upon man by God. If you read, for example, Condillac, or if you read Lord Monboddo, you would find that they believed that language came into being as a result of certain biological or physiological needs. In Condillac it is a genuine physiological need, in Monboddo it's a little more conscious: human beings seeking to communicate, seeking to express themselves, and finding that incoherent noises and gestures didn't perform this task sufficiently well, proceed in some almost conscious sense – almost, not quite – to invent language exactly as one invents a chair, a table, the screw, as one uses fire: that is to say, it is a specific invention generated by human beings in a utilitarian spirit at a certain point of human evolution.

This was denied very hotly by theologians, led by a German theologian called Süssmilch, who pointed out, quite correctly, that there was something illogical about this hypothesis: that in order to invent, human beings must think, that one thinks in symbols – after all that is what thought is – and therefore one cannot invent symbols because, since one uses them for the purpose of invention one cannot invent the act of inventing, and therefore the cart is put, there, before the horse. In 1772 the Berlin Academy offered a prize for the best essay on the origins of language, and Herder wrote one and obtained the prize. Herder was a very faithful disciple of Hamann, and Herder put forward an intermediate theory of language, neither the first nor the second, neither a priori nor wholly empirical. He said that Süssmilch was perfectly right to suppose that human beings couldn't suddenly have invented language like that; they couldn't have invented language because presumably words, symbols, the whole systematic use of certain marks on paper, or certain sounds, for certain purposes couldn't have been adopted by human beings until and unless their consciousness, their reason, their faculties had developed to a certain degree; and when their faculties, their consciousness and their reason had developed to this degree, then the very development of the consciousness and the faculties to this degree was in fact the use of symbolism. The use of symbolism was itself

a natural organic development of human faculties in a certain direction. Therefore it was impossible to suppose that this was something which human beings had suddenly thought of: having not had language on a Tuesday, suddenly someone came, produced a brilliant invention, and on Wednesday, suddenly, this wonderful liberating instrument came into being, called language, after which we have never looked back.

That Herder correctly denied. On the other hand, he didn't see why Süssmilch should be right, who maintained that language was a gift of grace, that human beings were completely inarticulate before, suddenly God dropped language into their lap as a free gift of grace, and with surprise and gratification they suddenly observed themselves, they didn't themselves know how, in possession of this miraculous faculty. That appeared to him equally irrational, equally illogical, equally improbable, historically speaking, and therefore he produced a very sensible naturalistic theory by which reason and speech, being interwoven, develop as one, and therefore there isn't a specific problem about the invention of speech, just as there isn't a specific problem about the invention of reason, or the invention of the imagination, or the invention of sight, or the invention of hearing, or the invention of articulation. These things occur as they do.

Hamann was quite pleased with the essay, so far as it went, against Lord Monboddo or against Condillac or against Harris or against various other theories in the eighteenth century, but it was a little over-naturalistic for him, and he wrote to Herder, and he said: This will do, but you have left out the divine, you have left out God, you have left out the fact that God speaks to us, and we understand God because he has made us capable of understanding him. He has made everything. You implant in a sensible nature that which belongs to God. Herder was moved by this – he admired Hamann more than any other living man. He described himself as 'a camel-driver who collects the golden apples which fall from the

lap of the holy man sitting on the camel as he reads the Koran';[45] and, being in this mood, on the whole retracted, partly because he wished to please Hamann, and partly, I daresay, because he was a Protestant clergyman and it ill behoves a Protestant clergyman to deny the powers of God, and to deny, indeed, the doctrine of natural kinds which in this essay he did tend to deny. Nevertheless Hamann was stimulated by Herder's errors, as it seemed to him, to his own theory of language, which is somewhat analogous, but not entirely.

What powerfully moved Hamann's indignation to the highest possible pitch of intensity was the remark of the abbé Dubos, who was an eminent French aesthetician of this period, who said: 'What one has felt and thought in one language one can express with equal elegance in any other.'[46] This appeared to Hamann to be one of the least veracious remarks ever made by a human being. He said that our cast of mind is entirely based on sensuous impressions; that sensuous impressions and associated feelings, as he calls them, occur differently in different organisms, in different climates and in different circumstances. If you wish to understand the Bible, he says, you must comprehend 'the Oriental character of the eloquence of the flesh that takes us to the cradle of our race and religion'.[47] Images come before words and images are created by passions, and passions are not analogous in men under different circumstances. He then says: Every man is unique, every man possesses his own character, and words, symbols, are the natural expression of these unique human beings. There may be certain similarities, but what is important, of course, as always for him, is the unique quintessence which every human being incorporates and which he expresses in a particular use of symbols which he employs.

[45] More literally: 'a Turkish camel-driver gathering up holy apples before his holy ambler, which carries the Koran'. Herder to Hamann, February 1765, B ii 315.35–6.

[46] Untraced.

[47] 'Kleeblatt Hellenistischer Briefe' ['A Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters'] (1762), First Letter, W ii 170.37–9.

The central proposition of Hamann is that there is no difference between words and thoughts, and this for his time was a moderately bold thing to say. It is not the case that there is something called ideas, such that you look for words like gloves to fit these ideas. It is not the case that you think in thoughts and then look for something called words, noises, marks on paper, symbols, pictures, whatever it may be, in which to incorporate these thoughts for the purpose of communicating them to others. If you cannot use symbols, you are not thinking at all. Thinking *is* symbol-using, thinking *is* using either images or words; these two acts are literally identical for him. Language and thought are one, like God and His Shekhina, like God and his Tabernacle, he says.[48] 'Every court, every school, every profession, every closed corporation, every sect – each has' – and must have – 'its own vocabulary.' How do we penetrate them? We can penetrate them only with the passion of 'a friend, an intimate, a lover'[49] – by faith, by belief, not by rules.

Why is this so? Because the uniqueness of each human being is expressed by his gestures, is expressed by his facial expression, is expressed by the spasmodic movements which he makes, is expressed by his gait, by the way in which he gets up and by the way in which he sits down, by a thousand small and unconsidered movements of his body and his soul, which for him, of course, are one. That being so, language, symbolism is one of the means of expression of this uniqueness; and therefore the attempt to say that one can draw up rules for language, and that these rules are in some cases artificial rules, and that language submits to artificial rules exactly as, say, mathematics, which really *is* a human invention, submits to artificial rules, and that language is a tool, a gadget, an invention, and therefore is capable of being analysed into something which human beings have either discovered or invented for it, must be false.

[48] 'Zwey Scherflein zur neusten Deutschen Literatur' ['Two Mites for the Latest German Literature'] (1780), W iii 237.10–11.

[49] 'Kleeblatt Hellenistischer Briefe' (note 47), First Letter, W ii 172, line 21; 171, line 15.

You can no more invent language than you can invent feeling, than you can invent thought, than you can invent any other natural human activity. And for him there is a mystical analogue to this. The mystical analogue is that when Adam was in Paradise, then God spoke to him in such a manner that Adam understood everything, because the language in which God spoke was the language the understanding of which he implanted in Adam, and he understood without having to learn the language painfully as sometimes *we* have to; and the world, the very notion of what the world is, the whole notion of articulated experience, the whole notion of, say, the distinction between the external and the internal world, the distinctions of colours and shapes, the distinction of any kind of categories and concepts in terms of which you try to describe and contrast objects in the world – all this is the function of language. Not only can you not do it without language, but to do it *is* to use language; that is what language *is*. It is the function of discriminating, of comparing, of saying, of thinking, of feeling. Even in feeling, says Hamann, some occult symbolism occurs; that is to say, as soon as we become self-conscious; once we become self-conscious, symbolism is intermixed with it. Now if that is so, then there is a certain sense in which your world *is* your symbols: there isn't a world stretched in front of you, a *rerum natura*,[50] a given, coherent, articulated entity, and then you have to invent something or other with which to cover it, with which to articulate, with which to translate it, and that is why it is obviously absurd to say that a thing which can be stated in one language can be stated with equal elegance in every other. What can be said in French cannot be fully said in German; what can be said in German cannot be fully said in English; because these languages are the unique expressions of unique individuals living in unique circumstances and express differences as deeply as they express similarities, and what you can skim off, which is what the scientists do, that is to say, what you can skim off if you do produce a generalised language of a highly conceptual kind which is extremely formal in its structure, simply

[50] 'Nature of things'.

invented for the purpose of catching similarities and omitting what are regarded as irrelevant differences, in other words when you invent a perfect translating machine, then what you catch with it is for Hamann not worth catching.

I don't say that he would necessarily deny that this was possible, but his point is: We use language for the purpose of conveying experience; when we meet people, which is to him the most important of all phenomena, when we speak to other human beings, or to God, we wish to be understood and wish to understand them; this cannot be done by any application of mechanical rules. These things are at most some kind of aid, but they are not the key to understanding. Understanding is a unique act of mutual recognition which is not susceptible to rules inasmuch as it is of necessity unique and of necessity sufficiently dissimilar to other such acts to be of supreme value in itself. As you may perceive, he exaggerates; and indeed one could say about him, as one could say about other thinkers, that the thought of very few thinkers has survived who did not exaggerate. But Hamann perhaps exaggerated a little too much. At any rate, he supposes that philosophy is entirely concerned with words. This is a very modern-sounding statement. He certainly supposes that metaphysics and philosophy, whether true or false, is not concerned with things; it is concerned with concepts, with categories, and these concepts and categories are words. 'All idle talk about reason is mere wind', he says; '*language* is its organon and criterion!'[51] Language is like currency: men of genius can use it, but officials turn it, as they do everything, to sterile dogmatism, which they proceed to offer for their own worship by the people. And among these sterile officials he includes metaphysicians and philosophers of his own time.

Creation is speech.[52] 'Through *it* [language] are *all things* made.'[53] This mysterious statement means that God created the universe by

[51] Hamann to Herder, 8 December 1783, B v 108.6–7.

[52] Hamann to Gottlob Immanuel Lindner, 9 August 1759, B i 393.28–9.

[53] Hamann to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 22–30 October 1785, 28 October, B vi 101.24–5.

some articulated act which is at any rate analogous to some conscious act, which is analogous to thinking. Just as God therefore must have implanted and created the world or articulated it by using, as Hamann supposes, those sacred symbols of which we sometimes catch glimpses, if only we attend to the words of the Bible sufficiently closely, so we, when we ask ourselves what the world is like, can operate only by means of our symbols and our words, which are not detachable from the world to which they apply. Indeed they don't apply to anything, they are part of it. The whole of the Hamann doctrine is that the notion of dividing the words and what the words are about – objects and symbols – is one more instance of this appalling act of diremption, of cutting, of abstraction, of division which has bedevilled the entire history of rational thought. That is why the cardinal sin, for Hamann, is 'to mistake *words* for *concepts* and *concepts* for *real things*',[54] which metaphysicians have done from the beginning of time. 'Reason is language, *logos*. On this marrowbone I gnaw, and shall gnaw myself to death on it',[55] he said to Herder three years before he died.

Let me give you a typical mystical passage by Hamann, so as not to make him out too modern a philosopher, too much of a modern linguistic philosopher, although you will perceive certain affinities, because the very notion that philosophy is about language, that paralogisms of the understanding, which Kant talks about, for example in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, according to Hamann are simply paralogisms of words, language. If we get into paradoxes, as Kant tries to prove, if we get into contradictions of a certain kind, these contradictions are not due to the mistaken function of certain faculties on our part. Faculties can't make mistakes, says Hamann; faculties just operate, so to speak; besides which there are no faculties, there is only one act of cognition: all these divisions into intuition, understanding, imagination, fancy, reason, *Vernunft*, *Verstand*, all these words, all this is idle chatter for him; there is only cognition or action – and cognition and action are

[54] Hamann to Jacobi, 14 November 1784, B v 264.36–7.

[55] Hamann to Herder, 6–10 August 1784, 8 August, B v 177.18–19.

one, of course, for him. To recognise the world is already to take up an attitude towards it; to take up an attitude towards it is to act in a certain fashion; and therefore thought and action are one, and he may for this reason also be regarded as one of the fathers of the famous theory of the unity of theory and practice. Well:

> Every phenomenon of nature was a word – a sign, symbol or pledge of a new, inexpressible but all the more intimate union, communication and community of divine energy and ideas. Everything that man heard in the beginning, and saw with his eyes, contemplated, all that his hands touched, was a living word; for God was the Word. With this word in his mouth and in his heart the origin of language was as natural, as near and as easy as child's play.[56]

That's how it was with Adam in Paradise. After that there was the Fall, human arrogance, the Tower of Babel, and the terrible cold destruction made by philosophical reason. Rational religion is a contradiction in terms, like rational language. There is nothing which Hamann would have rejected with more fervour and indignation than the notion of a logically perfect language, or a logically correct language. The notion that there is a *rerum natura*, there is a structure of reality to which you can adjust language as a grid or as a machine, would have appeared to him to be the denial of the most self-evident of all facts.

One of the little tracts in which he makes it clear what his attitude is towards language is a very peculiar and very typical little pamphlet which he produced, which is called 'The New Apologia [or Defence] of the Letter *h*', which he published in 1773. It arose as follows.

There was a perfectly respectable Lutheran theologian called Damm in Berlin, who, in the course of offering various suggestions

[56] 'Des Ritters von Rosenkreuz letzte Willensmeynung über den göttlichen und menschlichen Ursprung der Sprache' ['The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-Cross on the Divine and Human Origin of Language'] (1772), W iii 32.21–8.

about the possible etymological reform of German, suggested that the letter *h*, when it came after consonants in German, or where it came at the ends of words, played no part, had no use – it didn't add to the actual sound – and therefore for reasons of utility might as well be dropped. This aroused Hamann's rage in no uncertain manner. He said that the letter *h*, of course, was exactly as it had been described as being: certainly it was of no use. The notion of getting rid of things because they were of no use seemed to him the worst of all possible reasons for any form of action at all. Damm wishes to get rid of this poor letter *h*, he says, in order to create a spick and span world, a swept and garnished world in which everything shall be useful, everything shall be clear, everything shall be elegant, and everything shall be symmetrical. One can already foresee what the nature of the criticism is going to be. This leaves out from the world everything which is irregular, everything which is irrational; all it leaves is Leibniz's 'sufficient reason'.[57] If things don't have sufficient reason, out with them. Sufficient reason, says Hamann, is 'a lamentable, poor, blind, naked' little thing.[58] 'Your life', says the letter *h* suddenly, addressing itself to Baron Grimm in Paris, who supported Damm in this matter:[59] 'Your life is what I am myself, a breath' – '*ein Hauch*', *h*.[60] God has created poor little useless *h*, but he will not be allowed to perish from the earth, says Hamann suddenly. And then there is a tremendous hymn to God, which immediately follows. Those who wish to prove God by design have no faith in such as me, says the letter *h*; such a God exists only by the logic of vain, puffed-up logicians, and the logician is obviously prior to the God

[57] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology* (1714), paras 31–2.

[58] 'Neue Apologie des Buchstaben h' (1773), W iii 100.21.

[59] Damm and his ilk are apostrophised by Hamann as 'You little prophets of Böhmisch-Breda!' (ibid., 105.1, 106.9, 107.15), an allusion to *Le Petit Prophète de Boehmischbroda* [*The Little Prophet of Boehmischbroda*] (n.p., 1753), a pamphlet ostensibly reporting the vaticinations of a prophet born in a Bohemian village, actually by Baron Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, the celebrated Paris critic, a correspondent of Catherine the Great, a friend of Diderot, Holbach and many other figures of the Enlightenment. I.B.

[60] ibid., 105.4.

whom he creates. In such a universe I – little *h* – could not survive, but thanks to the true God I do and shall.

It was no great distance from this – and from then Hamann goes on to defend every kind of ancient institution. The door is then opened to a tremendous Romantic defence of everything which is useless but old, useless but has meaning for people, useless but expresses in some unique way the impalpable, the immeasurable, the unanalysable essence of something which reason condemns. He says that ancient institutions and usages must be defended, because if they are suppressed, then there is a danger that the soul will be killed altogether, as the French reformer obviously seemed to be doing. In a world, he says, built by Helvétius there will be no colour, no novelty, no genius, no thunder, no lightning, no agony, no transfiguration. That is what, of course, Goethe meant in that famous passage when he talks about his life in Strasbourg when he was young, in the 1770s, and he met Herder, who was suffering with a disease of the eyes, and Herder preached to him what in effect he had learned from Hamann. Referring to Holbach's famous *Système de la nature*, which is a famous atheistical and naturalistic work, Goethe says:

> We could not conceive how such a book could be dangerous. It appears to us so dark, so cold, so Cimmerian, so corpse-like that we found it difficult to endure its presence and shuddered at it as at a ghost. The author imagines that he gives the book a special recommendation when he says in its preface that as a decrepit old man, just sinking into the grave, he wishes to declare the truth to his contemporaries and to posterity before he dies.
>
> We laughed at him: […] 'Old churches', we said, 'have dark windows; to know how cherries and berries taste, we must ask children and sparrows!' These are our gibes, these are our maxims. […] How hollow and how empty we felt in this

> melancholy, atheistical half-night, in which the earth vanished with all its images, heaven with all its stars.[61]

That is direct Hamannian doctrine. Without Hamann, Herder would not have believed these things, and without Herder, Goethe is scarcely likely to have spoken them. That was the way in which these doctrines were transformed into Goethe's prose, and in this way achieved a world stage, and world fame.

This is Hamann's doctrine of language, and from this it's no great distance to his political views, which I might say something about here too. He believes, because of the letter *h*, that everything old, everything decrepit, everything which is ancient must be preserved. He obviously thinks that the crooked alleyways of the past mustn't be straightened out, for fear of losing something impalpable. This is rather like his friend Möser, who practised conservatism of a very analogous order. Our ancestors knew what they were doing. By altering things too much, by straightening things out, by sweeping the universe too clean we are removing that in it which is dear to us, which gives us a sense of our own identity and past – general conservative doctrine. Hamann went further than this. In the course of an attack on a book called *Master and Servant* by a well-known enlightened German bureaucrat called Friedrich Karl von Moser, which was a paean to enlightened despotism, in fact, Hamann says: So that is what we are to believe. The enlightened despot on the top, and everyone else below. This is the rational universe.

And he proceeds to identify, in a very typical fashion, political absolutism, scientific rationalism and generalising propositions in the sphere of aesthetics. Despotism in aesthetics on the part of the abbé Batteux and the abbé Dubos precisely corresponds to enlightened despotism on the part of von Moser's despot, and precisely corresponds to the general propositions which Helvétius

[61] *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* [*From My Life: Poetry and Truth*] (1811–33), *Goethes Werke* [*Goethe's Works*] (Hamburg, 1948–64), part 3 (1814), book 11, 490–1.

and Holbach would like us to substitute for the intuitive, rather more crooked, less elegant, less symmetrical views which men naturally live by. A constitution, says Hamann, can be written, a constitution can be published, a constitution cannot be believed in, a constitution cannot be lived, and we need something in terms of which life can be lived. Therefore all these attempts to create a schema whereby rational organisation takes the place of that chaotic growth which God has stimulated by his imaginative gifts as the artist of the universe, the attempt to alter that which God has created in the direction of rules or formulae which God cannot have stimulated, or has stimulated merely to our doom – cannot have stimulated at least in his capacity as a benevolent creator – as you will discover by reading the Bible, which is chaotic and rightly so. There is always this harking back, always this contrast between the smooth generalisations of the French and the thunder and the lightning and the chaos and the dark woods of the Bible, of Luther and so forth. Since this is so, this is what spells our doom.

He came back to the attack against Mendelssohn and against Kant. The position about Mendelssohn was quite an interesting one. In a sense they were friends. Mendelssohn was his first publisher; he thought Hamann, as I told you in my first lecture, was an interesting man with touches of brilliance; he published some of his writings in his Berlin publication, he and Nicolai, and then, towards the end of his life, published a celebrated work called *Jerusalem*, which is a plea for toleration for minorities in general and the Jews in particular. And in it he develops a perfectly conventional view, which a great many persons at that period held, and of which Mendelssohn gives a perfectly eloquent, though not perhaps a very first-hand, exposition, about the relations of the Church and the state, and about the foundations of political life in general; and he says – echoing Spinoza, echoing to some extent Locke, echoing a good many rationalists in the eighteenth century – that after all the state is founded upon two great foundations – natural law and the contract. Natural law is that which any reasonable being perceives to be true; that is what the Stoics have told us, that is what Cicero has told us, that is what St Thomas has told us. As for

promises, this is a social contract which must be kept because the keeping of contracts – *pacta sunt servanda*[62] – is itself a part of natural law.

If this is so, then, since the state is founded upon this rational foundation, since the whole moral foundation of the state rests upon the existence in it of rational men who have with rational freedom undertaken to live a certain kind of life, to obey a certain kind of government, not to perform certain acts, because they are anti-social in character, and to obey the laws, provided they are passed in a form of which they approve, and which is rational in character – since this is so, any state which suppresses rationality suppresses its own foundations. It can repress conduct, which it may not like because this conduct is dangerous to the foundations of the state as such. It can repress opinion where this opinion is dangerous. But to impose violent censorship, to impose unanimity, for example of religion, to impose unanimity of moral opinions against the freedom of rational beings is to cut off the metaphysical or moral branch on which the state itself may be said to be sitting. This was not, as I say, a very unconventional point of view, this was quite normal, and Mendelssohn published this in the interests of the Jews, who, he said, possessed a religion which was indeed different to that of Christians, but their actions in no way departed from the normal conventions of the times – they were good citizens. All that men could be expected to do in a state was to obey its laws. If they obeyed its laws, and did not preach any doctrine which was subversive of the state, then their religion was a private affair, because they had a right as rational beings to make a choice of that which they believed, provided this was not in itself subversive of life together. And this was therefore a plea for the state to keep its hands off religion, to keep its hands off moral and theological beliefs.

Hamann is exceedingly indignant. He says: So the state is founded on contract. In other words, if it were possible by reason to refute the proposition, say, that the contract had been entered

[62] 'Agreements must be kept.'

into by me or by my ancestors, or if it were possible by reason to refute the proposition that natural law is such as Isidore of Seville says it is, or such as St Thomas says it is, or somebody else says – if it were possible to disprove this, then the state would dissolve at once, it would disintegrate immediately, it would fall to pieces. Nobody but a fool can believe this. The state is an ancient product of human symbiosis. It is created by the intercommunication of human beings with emotions, intuitions, flesh as well as spirit – you can't go back to all the regular Hamannian theses at this point – all these faculties on the part of men, or if they are not to be called faculties, all these means of interlacing on the part of human beings, which is what men are, for men are organically and essentially intercommunicating beings, for they cannot be conceived in any other terms – all this is not the product of reason. This is the product of life together, this is the product of love, of hatred, of jealousy, of ambition, of the worship of God, of all kinds of complex and unanalysable human relations: he speaks the language which is somewhat similar to that of Burke, but a great deal more extravagant, and a great deal more violent. And Mendelssohn tells us that, if these propositions were refuted or even contradicted, then this whole structure would fall to pieces, as if it was a house of cards held together by nothing more than mere irrational agreement. Even the justification of it cannot be regarded as that, because there is no such thing as justifying what there is; we don't justify trees, we don't justify animals, we don't justify the imagination, we don't justify thought, we don't justify man; why on earth, then, should we justify something which is equally natural, equally indestructible, equally eternal, namely society? And as for the state, it is simply a particular form which this society has taken in the course of natural, irregular, crooked, essentially asymmetrical growth, which is naturally hostile to the artificial reasons of the Paris reasoners.

He then goes on to say: And what is more, Mendelssohn wants us to believe that religion should take its proper place in the state. This means that God must know where he belongs, he mustn't go out of the proper bounds which are set for him by the civic

authorities. Religion mustn't interfere with the normal civilised habits of men. You can imagine the kind of reaction which Hamann produces against this. And there follows a very violent and very passionate sermon to the effect that the very notion that the most sacred things there are, that our faith in God, that that by which we live our lives, and the most sacred principles of all, our communication with our maker, which is the whole of the end and goal of our existence – to relegate this to be simply another province of life, like paying taxes, like serving in the army, like any other normal function of human beings, that is the form of the profoundest possible blasphemy against nature, against man and against God. In short, he is pleading for what ultimately comes to some kind of loose anarchistic theocracy. He says that the notion of saying: Religion is all very well in its place, but it won't do if it interferes with the serious concerns of life – which is a parody or caricature which he produces of Mendelssohn – that this is an absolute denial of all that is most important and most profound in individual and in social existence.

He then transfers his attack to Kant, whom he was rather fond of baiting. He liked Kant personally, Kant lent him money, Kant was kind to him. Kant thought he was rather mad, but was amiable to him. 'One can only laugh' at these 'men of genius, or perhaps apes of genius', he said, '[…] and patiently continue on one's own path with assiduity, order, clarity, paying no attention to those charlatans'[63] – and did so. Kant, he says, as a loyal Prussian, in a little pamphlet called *Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, which was an attack upon paternalist government, which should have pleased Hamann to that extent – Kant said that if the prince or the sovereign orders me to do something that I deem to be wrong, I must as a private person – still more as an official – carry

[63] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*] (1798), part 1, book 1, § 58: *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* [*Kant's Collected Works*] (1900–) vii 226, lines 10–11, 20–2. The passage is corrupt in the recording, and has been replaced by a version of IB's use of the same quotation at TCE2 244. There is, however, no direct evidence that Kant was thinking of Hamann when he wrote this.

it out; I have no right to disobey; but as a rational being, being a member of a rational society, I have a duty to criticise such an order. I am a combination, on the one hand of a private person, and on the other of a publicist or a philosopher, a theologian or a professor, whose duty it is, of course, always to speak out. Hamann says: So, a professor is at once a master and a slave, a guardian and a minor, an adult and a child. 'So the public use of reason and liberty is but a dessert, whereas the private use of these excellent things is the daily bread that we must give up, the better to taste the dessert.'[64] In public I wear the trappings of freedom as professor, while at home I have nothing but the rags of a slave, as the obedient servant of Frederick the Great. What on earth is the use of this?, he says. Faith alone gives us strength to resist guardians and tutors, who not only kill our bodies, but empty our pockets, and we cannot do this by mere means of Kant's abstract 'good will'.

And there follows a tremendous attack on intellectuals of this type, who subvert natural human morality. And he goes on to say: Obedience to reason is simply a call to open rebellion. Nicolai, who was Mendelssohn's co-editor in Berlin, and a very reasonable, amiable, high-minded and tolerant man, and did a very great deal for German enlightenment and education, once wrote of Hamann: 'There is room in the world for both of us';[65] after all, we don't understand each other. Hamann said: Certainly not. There is not room for both truth and falsehood: one or other must perish in the fight. Rationalists, philosophers, scientists, Jews,[66] foreigners must

[64] Hamann to Christian Jacob Kraus, 18 December 1784, PS, B v 292.5–7.

[65] '[E]s ist Raum für Dich und uns in der Welt' ['There is room for you and us in the world']: from a review of 'Zweifel und Einfälle über eine vermischte Nachricht' (note 33), *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* [*Universal German Library*], supplement to vols 25–36 (1780), part 4, 2479. See also Blum (note 28) 370. The review is unsigned, but the attribution to the periodical's co-editor Nicolai is plausible.

[66] Hamann's attitude to the Jews has been the subject of some dispute. See, for example, the essay by Ze'ev Levy on Hamann's controversy with Mendelssohn in Bernhard Gajek and Albert Meier (eds), *Johann Georg Hamann*

be kept in their place. This strikes a sinister note because it embodies in one attitude a kind of anti-rationalism, anti-intellectualism, demotic patriotism which was there in Hamann, the roots of faith in the deep, irrational instincts of the common people against the murderous and dehydrating effect of highbrow intellectuals, which afterwards entered as an ingredient into all kinds of chauvinistic exhibitions in Germany, and ultimately entered as an element into Fascism itself. Hamann himself, be it said to his honour, never took part in the persecution of rationalism which did occur after the death of Frederick the Great. He was too eccentric, too isolated, too queer, too much on his own to do any of these things. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this kind of propaganda undoubtedly did enter into the general brew of anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism, illiberalism and the kind of collective emotionalism which afterwards developed into all kinds of irrationalist movements in the nineteenth century.

I fear that I must end. Finally let me say this. If you say: Why should Hamann be paid any attention at all? – well, of course he exaggerated, as I say, as all philosophers who ever made a mark, I think, or nearly all, exaggerated. Erasmus didn't exaggerate, and we don't read him. Thomas Reid didn't exaggerate, and we don't read him much. If you ask yourself about the great thinkers of the world, I think you will find that they generally exaggerated. Hamann lived at a time when there is no doubt that there was a

und die Krise der Aufklärung [*Johann Georg Hamann and the Crisis of the Enlightenment*] (Frankfurt am Main etc., 1990), 327–44. However, there is undoubtedly a scattering of anti-Jewish remarks in Hamann's writings – see, for example, 'Hierophantische Briefe' ['Hierophantic Letters] (1775), *Third Letter*, W iii 146.34; *Fourth Letter,* 151.31; 'Fliegender Briefe II' ['Flying Letter, Second Version'] (1786), 395.11, 397.18–19; Hamann to Jacobi, 27 April to 3 May 1787, 3 May, B vii 181.5–7, Hamann to Jacobi, 10 May 1788, ibid. 467.26–7; as well as several passages in *Golgotha und Scheblimini!* [*Calvary and Sit Thou at My Right Hand!*, the two terms standing for abasement and exaltation] (1784), W iii 291–320 – and although he was certainly concerned to defend what he saw as true Judaism against perversions of it, and well disposed to Mendelssohn as an individual, it is not plausible to maintain that he was free of what later came to be called anti-Semitism. In this he was, of course, entirely typical of his age.

considerable simplification of the sociology and psychology and general attitudes towards what men were and society was, and this outraged him and he naturally went too far in the opposite direction in trying to restore what he regarded as the proper balance in this respect. He constantly tries to break through the crust of complacency, of smugness, of the general acceptance of scientific formulae as the key to life. He saw a world in which it appeared to him that human beings had broken up, in which we had over-specialised. If you wish to put it in sociological terms, it's possible to suppose that Hamann was really a seventeenth-century man who survived into the eighteenth century, rather as Dr Johnson was in England. He lived in the enlightened state of Frederick the Great, who was undoubtedly trying to make Prussia the most powerful and the most important state in Germany, and he was going there by forced marches. He produced agricultural crisis by his mercantilist policy, he introduced education and then was unable to provide sufficient employment for the children of poor but educated men. He drove his subjects, both military and civilian, in a very ruthless manner, and stamped upon all kinds of ancient institutions, altered them, rationalised them, centralised them and altogether vigorously tried to make an extremely modern state out of Prussia, which to some degree he succeeded in doing, somewhat in the manner, though perhaps not quite so violently, as Peter the Great in Russia.

Hamann's voice was the voice of a 'toad beneath the harrow'.[67] His universe was being shot to pieces, his whole emotional and cultural tendencies were towards something older, something far less rationalistic, and he saw in Frederick the Great, whom he calls contemptuously 'the Solomon of Prussia', simply an Ahab who takes away Naboth's vineyard – he, Hamann, being Naboth – simply a wicked king who puts up a lot of wooden idols before his people in the form of reason, science, symmetry, order, all these

[67] From the epigraph to Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Pagett, M.P.', in *Departmental Ditties and Other Verses* (Calcutta, 1886), 43: 'The toad beneath the harrow knows / Exactly where each tooth-point goes. / The butterfly upon the road / Preaches contentment to that toad.'

totally inhuman values into which human flesh is being ground, and by which appalling uniformity is being introduced in what was before that, at least for him, a world of living and therefore asymmetrical beings. And that is, I suppose, the reason for and the essence of this *cri de coeur*. A great many of the things which Hamann said were plainly not true. His attacks on Kant missed the point. He failed to perceive that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was a profound philosophical work. His proposition that general propositions should never be used, or that concepts and categories are of no use, is quite obviously meaningless. A great many of the charges which he levels at French science and French historical writing are beside the point.

Let me say one more thing. I don't think Hamann cared in the least about science and history. If he was told that scientists were simply curious about the way things were and wished to predict and control them, he wouldn't have minded. If he was told that what historians wanted to do was simply to discover how things happened, and use the most rational methods for the purpose of reconstructing the past, he would perhaps have agreed; but these things were of no interest to him. He was not curious about the past, and he was not interested in ordinary human lives; he was not interested in social facts as such; he was, as many such persons are, completely blind to human misery round him; he was not interested in social problems. He was completely absorbed in an act of mystical illumination of his own within himself, and as often happens to such people, he saw most clearly because he looked fanatically out of one window; but out of that window he did see what others did not see, and without Hamann neither Herder nor the German Romantic movement, nor all its consequences, both deleterious and beneficent, are altogether thinkable.

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Tomorrow I propose to talk about the very different figure of Maistre. I shall now stop for about two or three minutes.

The Second Onslaught
3 Joseph de Maistre and Open Obscurantism

Joseph de Maistre by Carl Christian Vogel von Vogelstein, 1810

IF HAMANN WAS an angry man, I think you will find that Maistre was an even angrier one. He started from very different origins than those of Hamann. Hamann was born in 1730, Maistre in 1753 in Chambéry in the Savoie. He was the son of a man who had been raised to the rank of a count because he was President of the court of the kingdom of Sardinia, particularly in the city of Chambéry. The general notion of Maistre is that he is a man of ancient lineage,

an aristocrat, an enemy to the Revolution, a great defender of the Church and the state against the abominable Jacobin crimes. This is perfectly valid, except that he was not a man of ancient lineage. The biographies of the twentieth century, though not those of the nineteenth, have finally revealed the fact that, although his father was raised to the dignity of being a count, his great-grandfather and his grandfather were drapers. This is a fact which never emerged in any of the biographies of Maistre in the nineteenth and even the early twentieth century; and although it may be an irrelevant fact, comparatively speaking, it does I think perhaps throw some light upon the particular passion with which he defends the order to which his family was but lately raised. This sometimes occurs in the case of *novi homines*[68] like Cicero and Burke, whom in other respects he resembles.

He had a very uneventful life as a young man: that is to say, he pursued the normal course of a young Savoyard aristocrat. He studied the law, he studied theology (in which he took little interest), he studied Latin and Greek. He joined a Masonic lodge, which in those days was not incompatible with belonging to the Roman Church, and throughout his life defended Freemasonry, even though it had been excommunicated. It had been denounced by papal bulls as early as the 1730s on the grounds that, although what the Freemasons and the illuminists taught was not Christian orthodoxy, or indeed in certain respects Christianity at all, yet it was a movement which was extremely useful against hard-shelled atheism, which, because it emphasised the spiritual nature of man and dwelt on the immortality of the soul and life after death, as might be said, softened up the soul for the approaches of true religion, and therefore should not be condemned in the round and completely intolerant way in which the Roman Church condemned it. It was a useful instrument towards the truth, and not, as was supposed by the Roman priesthood, a rival religion.

However this may be, Maistre belonged to a group of young aristocrats one of whose duties it was to give last comforts to the

[68] 'New men'.

condemned in Chambéry, and this probably did mean that he was present at a good many executions.[69] He dwells on blood and execution a good deal in his works, and some of his biographers suppose that this may be due to early memories of such scenes. At any rate he had a perfectly conventional life until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, which he welcomed in a moderate sort of way. By 1791 he was no longer in a welcoming mood. The Revolution spread to the comparatively liberal and progressive kingdom of Savoy, which had abolished feudalism already in the 1770s and was one of those cautious, liberal, not very extreme kingdoms rather like Switzerland in the nineteenth century, which was a good deal in advance of the more reactionary institutions of its time, though a good deal behind the more liberal ones; and when the Revolution began to spread into Savoy, which it ultimately inundated, Maistre emigrated, went to Lausanne, then went to Venice, then went to Cagliari in Sardinia, where the court was of which he was an official. And then finally, I think partly because of the intransigence of his views, he began producing monarchist pamphlets almost immediately, which although they were very counter-revolutionary and extremely violent in their defence of the monarchy, nevertheless said things which the émigrés didn't wish to hear, such as that the Revolution was irrevocable, that the attempt to try to go back to a pre-revolutionary status was like trying to exhaust the Lake of Geneva by means of collecting its water in bottles, and other things of this type, which were regarded as rather unwelcome to the not very progressive, not very bright, not very advanced courtiers and aristocrats collected round King Victor Emmanuel of Savoy in Cagliari.

At any rate, it was thought he was a rather uncomfortable customer. He was brilliant, he was an ally, but paradoxical, sharp, over-critical and liable to make remarks which caused offence at court. So it was decided to send him as far away as possible, and he was sent as Sardinian Minister to St Petersburg, in which he

[69] But see p. **89** below.

spent a large part of his life, in which he accumulated a good deal of interesting observation about the life of the Russians, the court, the army, the Church, the customs of the Russians. He published a good deal of this in his diplomatic memoirs and also in notes which he used to send privately to various friends in the Russian aristocracy, all of which were subsequently used by persons interested in this period in Russian history, notably Tolstoy.

The importance of Maistre lies in the fact that he was the most brilliant and the most polemical of the critics of the philosophy that underlay the French Revolution. As you may imagine, the French Revolution produced a great crop of analysis of its causes and effects. It promised liberty and equality, and although it undoubtedly did promote these in the case of certain sections of the population, it was difficult to maintain by, let us say, 1807 or 1808 that human happiness, at any rate on the part of most of those who desired it, had conspicuously increased as a result of the Revolution. Institutions had changed: some had become richer, others poorer, some freer, others more enslaved. A new, Napoleonic regime was in charge. But there was a great deal of painful reappraisal of, first of all, the causes of the Revolution, and secondly the reasons for its failure, both on the part of those who regretted this failure and on the part of those who exulted in it. The liberals attributed the failure to the unchaining of human passions, to the Terror. People like Saint-Simon maintained that it was due to the fact that while the Revolution was proceeding quite peacefully until 1791, then the mob took control, and proceeded to exterminate those enlightened intellectuals in whose hands alone the Revolution would have been safe and its fruits would have been preserved. Socialists and communists maintained that there was tremendous blindness on the part of the makers of the French Revolution to the social and economic structure of society, and to social and economic causality in general, and that because Robespierre had not pressed on with his egalitarian laws, and because the laws of property had not sufficiently been touched, the Revolution turned out to be a failure.

There were various other interpretations and explanations, as you may imagine. Hegelians maintained that this was due to an inadequate understanding of the general march of history and of the relationship of facts and ideas. The Catholic Church maintained, and Maistre maintained with it, that the true cause of the failure of the French Revolution was the rupture with the past, the departure from the word of God, heresy, the fact that there was a particular kind of life which had been enshrined in tradition and enshrined in the teachings of the Catholic Church, and by breaking this, and mutinying and rebelling against it, man had put himself beyond the pale, had become an outlaw, and was duly punished by God with such scourges as Robespierre and Napoleon.

If this had been all that Maistre said, he would not have been a very notable or interesting thinker. But he goes much further than this. He is determined to take to pieces the main theses of the Enlightenment, in particular as preached by the French Encyclopedists, and to show their shallowness and insubstantiality. And he begins by considering the propositions that man is rational, and that man seeks happiness. First of all the proposition that man is rational. He says: Whence do they derive this proposition? They derive this proposition from a study of nature. Therefore we must apply ourselves first to the study of nature, and then to the study of the alleged rationality of man. Well, how do they study nature? These men study nature by making analogies between nature and mathematics, and between nature and their own a priori philosophies. For Rousseau and for other thinkers nature is fundamentally a seamless harmony which man departs from; all human misery is due to the fact that human beings don't understand the harmonious nature of the reality in which they are situated. Animals and objects obey natural laws because they cannot avoid it, because they are not conscious, and therefore are unable to rebel. Man, on the other hand, because he has been given the boon of free will, is able, by misusing it, to alienate himself, is able to tear himself from nature, and the task then is to restore the broken equilibrium, and to restore man to the understanding of his own nature, his proper purposes and how these naturally blend

into the harmony of nature, which science and his other means of cognition are able to penetrate. Maistre says: These people look in mathematics and these people look within their own minds. Perhaps it would be more useful if they actually looked at history itself, or perhaps some of the sciences closer to man, such as zoology. If you look at zoology, this picture of a peaceful nature harmonious with itself, this picture of someone sitting by the rill of a stream, which Rousseau paints, away from the corrupt sophistication of the cities, listening to the whistling of the wind in the reeds and to the peaceful grazing of cows, and therefore able to get himself into a state of moral tranquillity, is not entirely valid. Nature is a world in which every animal rips every other animal to pieces. Nature is a world in which there is nothing but bloodshed; fearful struggle goes on between various races of animals, even between those of plants. In fact nature is one enormous slaughterhouse.

Let me read you a typical passage by Maistre on the subject, so as to give you the general quality of his imagination. If, he says, you consider what nature is impartially, and without the prejudices and sets of spectacles which these shallow men had inherited from persons principally interested in such non-human subjects as logic and algebra, what you will see is this:

> In the vast domain of living nature there reigns an open violence, a kind of prescriptive fury which arms all the creatures to their common doom. As soon as you leave the inanimate kingdom, you find the decree of violent death inscribed on the very frontiers of life. You feel it already in the vegetable kingdom: from the great catalpa to the humblest herb, how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*. But from the moment you enter the animal kingdom, this law is suddenly in the most dreadful evidence. A force, at once hidden and palpable, […] has in each species appointed a certain number of animals to devour the others. Thus there are insects of prey, reptiles of prey, birds of prey, fishes of prey, quadrupeds of prey. There is no instant of time when one creature is not being devoured by

> another. Over all these numerous races of animals man is placed, and his destructive hand spares nothing that lives. He kills to obtain food and he kills to clothe himself. He kills to adorn himself, he kills to attack, and he kills to defend himself. He kills to instruct himself and he kills to amuse himself. He kills to kill. Proud and terrible king, he wants everything and nothing resists him.

In French this becomes a kind of litany:

> il tue pour se nourrir, il tue pour se vêtir, il tue pour se parer, il tue pour attaquer, il tue pour se défendre, il tue pour s'instruire, il tue pour s'amuser, il tue pour tuer: roi superbe et terrible, il a besoin de tout, et rien ne lui résiste.

He goes on:

> […] From the lamb he demands its entrails to make his harp resound, […] from the wolf its most deadly tooth to polish his trifling works of art, from the elephant his tusks to make a toy for his child: his table is covered with corpses. […] And who [in this general carnage] will exterminate him who exterminates all the others? Himself. It is man who is charged with the slaughter of man. […] Thus is accomplished […] the great law of the violent destruction of living creatures. The whole earth, perpetually steeped in blood, is nothing but a vast altar, upon which all that is living must be sacrificed without end, without measure, without pause, until the consummation of things, until evil is extinct, until the death of death.[70]

[70] SPD (note 20), Dialogue 7, OC v 22–5 (passage quoted in French at 23). Maistre annotates the last phrase 'Car le dernier ennemi qui doit être détruit, c'est la mort" ['The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death'] (1 Corinthians 15:26).

This is Maistre's famous and terrible vision of life, and his violent preoccupation with blood and death really does belong to a world very different from the world to which he is usually attributed, the world of Burke, whom he admired, the world of the English conservatives, whom he is supposed to have read; a world very different from the world of the slow, mature wisdom of *Burke's Landed Gentry* or the deep peace of the country houses, great and small, or the eternal society of the quick and the dead, secure from the turbulence and the miseries of those less fortunately situated. It's equally far from the world of the mystics and the illuminists amongst whom he spent his youth.

If this is his view of nature, then it's not very surprising that he should say that man is fundamentally not made for peace, that if you look at the wars of extermination, at the fearful carnage with which human history is filled, it is difficult to say that man is by nature peaceful, and that man is by nature benevolent. But it is said that man is by nature rational. Let us consider this proposition too, says Maistre. Consider the institutions by which man is governed. Consider, for example, the institution of marriage. Nothing is more irrational than marriage, says Maistre. Why should a man choose a woman with whom to live for the rest of his life, when his attention might easily be distracted by other persons more attractive to him in later life? Nevertheless marriage is the one fundamental institution upon which human society is founded, and all attempts at creating societies founded upon free love have toppled. Consider the institution of monarchy. What is more irrational or absurd than that the son of a king, even a good king, should succeed him because he is his son? A wise king may have a stupid son, a good king may have an abominable son, and there is no reason for supposing that the children of good men or of strong men or of useful men will have the same qualities themselves. Consequently it is a far more rational arrangement to have such a system as you have in Poland, where you have the *liberum veto*,[71] where you don't have hereditary succession, where the nobles must

[71] 'Free veto'.

agree upon who is to be king. The result of which is that France was governed by sixty-six kings, some good, some bad, but mostly efficient, mostly capable, and is the fairest kingdom upon the face of the earth, whereas Poland with its rational system is plunged into constant turbulence and has collapsed before the very eyes of the civilised world in a welter of blood and chaos.

So much then for the stability and reliability of rational institutions. This is the typical kind of language Maistre uses; these are the paradoxes which he urges. I tried to give you a sample of these just to indicate the kind of thing which made him rather unpopular at the court of Cagliari. Although the moral of all this was pro-monarchist, in favour of irrationality, the Church, tradition, faith, against reason, analysis, light, perfectibilism, nevertheless the examples which he gave and the tone in which he gave them did undoubtedly rattle these rather conventional men.

He goes on, and he says: If stability is what is wanted – and stability is indeed wanted, for without stability society cannot exist – then the worst possible foundation upon which society could conceivably rest is what our eighteenth-century philosophers urge upon us, namely reason. Reason means argument, reason means a construction on the part of rational beings of a kind that other rational beings are able to criticise using exactly the same weapons: what man makes, man can mar. If you really want a stable foundation for society then the most shaky foundation upon which you can place is that of unaided human reason, because even though you may prove that one kind of institution is good, or even the best, another man cleverer than you will disprove it tomorrow. Anything which argument puts up, argument will pull down, and therefore nothing is less stable than things which rely upon such so precarious a foundation as reason, because one reason is constantly toppled by another. The only foundation which is ultimately stable is something which cannot be reached by destructive forces. Reasoning, analysis, pulverises.

This is an old Burkean argument, and this is something which Hamann would certainly have agreed to. Reason analyses, it takes to pieces; anything which is taken to pieces ceases to be mysterious,

becomes clear, and as a result of becoming clear sometimes falls into familiarity and thus contempt. Therefore the only way in which you can really secure a solid basis for government, which nobody will ever be able to shake, is by making it impervious to reason.

How is this done? This is done by founding societies upon foundations so dark, so mysterious and so terrifying that anyone who dares approach them will find himself subject almost immediately to the most hideous and enormous penalties. The only societies which have lasted are societies created by priests, in which the people have been taught a series of frightening myths whereby any kind of questioning of the foundations of society was itself regarded as sinful and about to bring about punishment. The only laws which have lasted amongst mankind are laws whose roots and sources are not remembered. Laws whose roots and sources are remembered are usually bad laws or at least laws which somebody wants to change. Custom is the foundation of our life – custom and the dark irrational sphere which nothing must be allowed to approach. Therefore authority must be blind. Once you allow people to argue about the basis of authority, once you allow people like Locke to discuss things like contract, or things like the justification of this or that form of government, you are done for. The only governments which have persisted, and been solid, are governments which do not permit discussion. Those are the governments which are on the whole the most stable.

He goes on from there to argue that this is what man fundamentally craves. We are told, he says, that man is born to freedom; at least M. Rousseau says that man is born to freedom. And then M. Rousseau wonders why it is that man who is born to freedom nevertheless is everywhere in chains. 'What does he mean?' says Maistre. '[…] The opposite of this insane pronouncement, *Man is born free*, is the truth.'[72] When you study fishes, when you study animals, you simply study what these

[72] *Du Pape* [*On the Pope*] (1819), book 3, chapter 2, 'Liberté civile des hommes' ['The Civil Liberty of Men'], OC ii 338.

animals do, what these animals are. You do not ask yourself what these animals would like to be, because you don't know. 'If someone aims to prove that the nature of the viper is to have wings and a melodious voice, and that of the beaver is to live in isolation on top of the highest mountains, it is for him to prove it.'[73] Maistre's jokes are of very high quality, I may say. I shall produce another one in due course, and you will see that he was a man gifted with a considerable ironical intelligence. In the case of man you don't study the actual history of man. If you study the actual history of man, you will discover that what men desire is security, what men desire is stability, what men desire is authority, what men desire is obedience. The last thing they desire is freedom: as soon as they are given freedom, everything crumbles and topples.

Take monarchy versus democracy. Well, monarchy, as we see, is already irrational enough. Yes, there have been glorious democracies. Athenian democracy was undoubtedly a magnificent phenomenon in human history, and how long did it last, and how much had we to pay for it afterwards? That is Maistre's plaint, that democracy, particularly Periclean democracy, is the kind of thing which human beings cannot bear upon their shoulders, the weight is too great. He says: If you really wish to study human nature, consider actual human behaviour instead of ideal human behaviour, as the eighteenth century appears to have done. Consider this, for example: supposing a visitor were to come to you from the moon, and supposing you were to present two individuals to him, and you were to say about one of these individuals that he did occasionally kill other human beings, but he did it very seldom, he did it without any pleasure to himself, he did it as a pure duty, and the human beings whom he killed were usually murderers or parricides or matricides or perjurers or other

[73] *Étude sur la souveraineté* ['Study on Sovereignty'] (1794), chapter 2, 'Origine de la societé', 318. Compare Émile Faguet's brilliant epigram in 'Joseph de Maistre', *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle* [*Political and Moral Thinkers of the Nineteenth Century*], 1st series (Paris, 1891), 41: 'Dire: les moutons sont nés carnivores, et partout ils mangent de l'herbe, serait aussi juste' ('To say that sheep are born carnivorous, but everywhere eat grass, would be just as reasonable').

abandoned criminals who were a menace to society. That is one of the individuals. The other individual whom you presented was a man who killed with a great deal of enthusiasm, killed persons who were perfectly innocent, and killed them in enormous quantities instead of merely killing them perhaps once in five or once in ten years. You will find that the first of these individuals is the executioner, and the second of these individuals is a soldier; and the reputation of soldiers is very different from that of executioners.

So much for human rationality. So much for the proposition that human beings accept the principles of the Enlightenment. Here is the executioner, who is a useful public servant, who does what he does with the utmost reluctance, and here is a soldier who kills with lust and with enthusiasm people certainly every bit as innocent as himself, and it is the soldier who is most deeply respected in our society. Why should this be? Consider, for example, he says, what people like and what they dislike, historically speaking. Never mind about what human beings should be or could be, or what you would like to see them as. Peter the Great, who was one of the great reformers of history, when he sent thousands and hundreds of thousands of Russians into battles and constant defeats, never had the slightest difficulty in doing so. They marched to battle and they died like sheep, perfectly obediently and without raising any protest. There was not the slightest sign of mutiny – there are very few mutinies amongst marching armies – and yet these men had no idea why they were marching, why they were killing those whom they were going to kill. Certainly they had no personal hostility towards the enemy, who was as innocent, as noble and as honourable as they were. On the other hand, when Peter tried to shave the beards of the boyars there was a riot. When in the eighteenth century there was an attempt to reform the calendar, there was practically a French mutiny. That is the kind of thing which people mind about: beards, calendars, yes; death, not in the least. And these are the people whom you wish to represent as rational, peace-loving, enlightened, illuminated, persons capable of governing themselves, potential democrats, potential liberals,

persons to whom M. Voltaire and M. Rousseau wish to entrust the government. That is Maistre's sermon.

He continues. He says that what men really want – if you ask yourself what they want, instead of what they ought to want – is not what all the benevolent philosophers of the eighteenth century said they wanted, namely to live together in society for the purpose of living a happier life together, for example through co-operation and mutual self-help. The general conventional view, after all, of the eighteenth century was that the purpose of society was to ensure reciprocal mutual benefits for human beings which they wouldn't be able to obtain for themselves. This is what Aristotle said, this is what St Thomas, in whom Maistre officially believed, said, and this is what a number of other thinkers, with a high degree of plausibility, have said, are saying, and I hope will go on saying. Maistre said: This is not true; what people really like, or at least among the things which people really like, is collective self-immolation. If you give people an altar upon which to sacrifice themselves, they rush towards it headlong, and without thinking much of what it is they are sacrificing themselves to: that is what makes wars possible.

Let me read you a passage on war, and you will see the kind of thing that he meant: 'What inconceivable magic is it which makes a man always ready at the first beat of the drum […] to go without resisting, often with even a kind of eagerness, […] in order to blow to pieces on the field of battle his brother, who has done him no wrong, and who on his side advances to subject him to the same fate if he can?'[74] Men who shed tears if they have to kill a chicken kill on the battlefield without a qualm. They do so purely for the common good, repressing their human feelings as a painful, altruistic duty. Executioners kill a very few guilty men, parricides, forgers and the like. Soldiers kill thousands of guiltless men, indiscriminately, blindly, with wild enthusiasm. Yet man is born to love. He is compassionate, just and good. He sheds tears for others and such tears give him pleasure. He invents stories to make him

[74] SPD, Dialogue 7, OC v 3–4.

weep. Whence then this furious desire for war and slaughter? Why does man plunge into the abyss, embracing with a passion that which inspires him, officially at any rate, with such loathing? Why do men who revolt over such trivial issues as attempts to change the calendar and so on allow themselves to be slaughtered? There is only one valid answer: men's desire to immolate themselves is as fundamental as their desire for self-preservation and happiness. War is the terrible and eternal law of the world. Indefensible on the rational plane, it is mysteriously and irresistibly attractive. At the level of reasoned utilitarianism, war is of course everything which it is thought to be, and worse. Nevertheless it has governed human history, and this merely shows the inadequacy of rationalist explanations.

What then must be done? What must be done is that man must be governed by some kind of discipline which gives vent to these irrational impulses, which nothing can cure. What Maistre really does believe, and this is something which is genuinely not a very eighteenth-century, nor even a very seventeenth-century view, is that the elements, the earth, call for blood. He really is given to a kind of sadistic fantasy in this respect; he feels that the whole of the world is filled with slaughter and the sounds of slaughter, that dark and irrational forces move men, and that to treat them as if they were creatures of light, to treat them as if they were rational or benevolent, is simply an empirical error; and anyone who does so is likely to lead men to their doom. Therefore what must be done is to govern men in a manner which prevents them from ripping each other to pieces. He sees man with a more than Hobbesian pessimism as a kind of ape-like, tiger-like creature, for no evident reason ready to rip other men to pieces – out of greed, out of ambition, out of general irrational impulse, and just for its own sake, simply out of aggressive instinct. And the only way in which this can be prevented is by placing over him a degree of harsh authority on the part of men who understand other human beings, which will imprison him and chain him. It will put some kind of armour, a sort of straitjacket, upon this potential lunatic,

which will prevent him from venting these terrible and self-destructive desires.

That is Maistre's picture of man, and he thinks that the French Revolution let loose these things. His attitude towards the French Revolution is unorthodox and quite interesting in that regard. Of course he disapproves of it, of course he thinks that the French Revolution is a great punishment sent by God upon men who have departed from the traditional discipline, the hierarchy, of the Roman Church, which kept people in a relative degree of order and prevented the worst kind of barbarism from occurring. Nevertheless he says that power must always be respected, because power is the only thing which stops people from disintegrating. He says it's always something which stops human beings. It may be conscience, it may be custom, it may be the assassin's dagger, it may be the papal tiara, but it is always something, never himself, he says, and therefore the idea of self-control, which is preached by the rationalists, the idea of self-coercion, is a contradiction in terms for him. Coercion must come from outside. Man is what he calls a theomorph and a theomach. Man is a monstrous centaur who both fights God and is made in his image. He is made in his image and to that extent he is rational and good, but he fights him because there are black instincts within him which nothing will ever finally quell, original sin, which nothing can ultimately exterminate. Man 'doesn't know what he wants; he wants what he doesn't want; he doesn't want what he wants; he *wants to want*' and cannot achieve it. 'He feels within himself a force more powerful than himself. If he is wise, he cries out and says: *Who will rescue me from this?* If he is stupid, he gives in, and calls his weakness *happiness*.'[75] That is the kind of epigram in which Maistre sought to summarise mankind.

If this is so, if this is what men are like, then of course they need strong government, that is perfectly clear. And what kind of strong government must they have? The kind of strong government which men must have is a government given to them in some

[75] SPD, Dialogue 1, OC iv 67–8.

irrational fashion: as I say, something which reason cannot reach, which reason cannot disintegrate, something which is sufficiently terrifying to keep people in a condition of permanent obedience. Our philosophers, he says, wish us to look at human nature as it truly is, and whom do they invite us to inspect? Why, of course, the savage, the noble savage, this primitive man, not corrupted by wicked civilised institutions. Savages are among the refuse of mankind, he suddenly observes. To say that we ought to imitate savages, to say that there is something about savages or about primitives which is superior is again to run against the most obvious facts of psychology and history. If you look at savages you will see that they are simply failures of the divine creation, they are simply debris of the divine process. Savages are drunken and they are barbarous. All they do is to scalp one another, eviscerate one another, and commit the most detestable crimes, and are subject to the most detestable vices, and there are no qualities amongst them which any civilised person could possibly envy.

He then begins to quote Montesquieu. Savages are people who, when the good missionaries give them a cart and an ox, burn the cart in order to roast the ox. 'They cut down the tree in order to eat its fruit' – that is what savages do. 'All they want of us', says Maistre, 'is powder to kill us and fire-water to kill themselves.'[76] That is what savages want, and these are the persons whom we are invited to emulate. If you look at their language, you will find there is none of the great primitive roots of language about which so many eighteenth-century thinkers have been enthusiastic, and seventeenth-century ones also. They are simply the corrupt remains of the total collapse of human civilisation; these are the failures of the divine process, and the sad cases which the good fathers, the good priests, the good missionaries have not told us the truth about. These men are kind, these men are good, these men are Christian, they don't want to reveal the hideous truth about the natives whom they find, and we have no business to be

[76] SPD, Dialogue 2, OC iv 84; cf. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* [*On the Spirit of the Laws*], part 1, book 5, capter 13.

deceived by the fact that these charitable fathers don't wish to reveal that the savages whom they come across are amongst the lowest and most detestable human creatures living on earth.

So much for primitive man. What else are we expected to emulate? If we are expected to emulate democracies we need only look at history, at their fate. When Maistre was in Russia he began giving advice on the government of Russia because he had very little to do as the representative of the Sardinian king. The Sardinian king was after all a pensioner of England and Russia. He was an enemy to Napoleon, who didn't actually invade Sardinia, though he took away Savoy and the Piedmont; and therefore, as Napoleon had an ambassador at the Russian court also, the ambassador of his enemy the King of Sardinia had a rather complicated relationship to him. He was rather like, in the Second World War, a Gaullist ambassador in the presence of the official ambassador of Vichy France, and that is why Maistre did not have much diplomatic business to prosecute. On the other hand he was a man of considerable charm, erudition and intelligence, obviously, and all the Russian memoirs of the time say what an agreeable and delightful person he was. And he was a great converter to the Church of Rome. He must have converted more noble ladies of the Russian court than anyone can have done before or after him. Indeed, he did it on so formidable a scale that in the end, in 1817, Alexander I requested his withdrawal, because it was thought that this was interfering with the business of government too much.

At any rate he used to send private notes to various Russian noblemen, and indeed to Alexander himself, about Russian affairs, and so far as the government was concerned the typical piece of advice which he offers is something of this kind. He says: Man is corrupt, man is sinful, man is a cruel and vicious creature who can only just be stopped from destroying others by the wise discipline imposed upon him by the few people wise enough and powerful enough to do so, namely priests or kings. This has been his whole history. The two institutions which have kept Europe comparatively peaceful, comparatively stable, have been the institution of serfhood and the Church itself. The Church

enunciated dogmatic propositions which human beings broke at their peril. Maistre wrote a little tract defending the Inquisition, which was quite a brave thing to do, in about 1810, on the ground that the Inquisition was at least better than fratricidal wars; the Inquisition did at least prevent what he supposed to be religious wars, say in Spain; and he paints the Inquisition in somewhat rosy colours. He says the Inquisition takes a man away and by reasoning with him, sometimes applying a little violence, returns him to the bosom of his family as a reformed Christian. If this had not been done he would have gone to the extremes to which his unbridled reason would have pushed him, he would have formed a party, he would have led a movement and hundreds of thousands of people would have died in some fearful slaughter as a result. Consequently the Inquisition is a force for peace.

Religion, then, and serfhood are the two anchors upon which stable human society rests. In Russia you still have, of course, serfhood, but the Church is too little respected. He says the Roman Church when it acquired the degree of authority which made it truly the arbiter of European fortunes, when the Pope really became the leader of Christendom, and a great deal of reverence and awe was owed to the Roman Church, and they established a solid discipline, was able, because it was Christian and because it was good, to abolish serfdom, because one anchor proved enough. But in your country the priests are drunken and ignorant, the bishops have no learning and no authority, and therefore your clerical establishment is despised by the people, and has no moral and no political authority. You can't lean on that. Therefore the only anchor you have for preventing your ship from going out to the high seas and being broken is of course the serf system. I know, he says, that people are constantly recommending you on economic and on humanitarian grounds to abolish serfhood, but this would be fatal. If you abolish serfhood, chaos would result. You would pass directly from the condition of your present barbarism to a condition of anarchy. It would not take long, he

says, for a few Pugachevs,[77] as he calls them – that is to say, a few mutineers – from the universities, supported by indolence and stupidity at home and criminal conspiracies on the part of the terrible 'sect'[78] abroad, the sect that never sleeps[79] – I shall tell you in a moment who they are – it would take very little time for these people to topple your entire kingdom, once the authority of the serf system has gone. And the Russians, he says, are extraordinary people. Nobody desires as ardently and as passionately as the Russians. If you lock up a Russian desire in a fortress, the fortress will blow up.[80] Your people desire science; nothing is more fatal. Scientists are persons who put everything in doubt, scientists are persons who analyse, scientists are persons who disintegrate.

We go back once again to Hamann, and to the disintegration of the living flesh of life under the terrible corrosive rays of analytical science. Scientists are persons who of all people, and as everyone has always known, know least about human nature. To put scientists in charge of any human institution is to guarantee its doom. The great governing people of the earth – the Jews, the Spartans and the Romans – despise science. When the Romans wanted science, they bought Greeks, who were their scientists for them, and the Romans knew that if they tried to be scientists themselves they would merely make themselves ridiculous. And the same is true of the Spartans, and the same is true of the Jews. These are the great races who have established memorable human institutions on earth – nobody has ever been as grand as that.

[77] Emel 'yan Ivanovich Pugachev was the leader of a peasant and Cossack rebellion crushed in the reign of Catherine the Great.

[78] e.g. *Étude sur la souveraineté* (note Error! Bookmark not defined.), chapter 12, OC i 407; *Reflexions' sur le Protestantisme, dans sews rapports avec la Souveraineté* [*Reflections on Protestantism, in Its Relations with Sovereignty*] (1798) OC viii 91; *Cinq lettres sur l'éducation publique en Russie* [*Five letters on Public Education in Russia*] (1810), OC viii 222–3; 'Mémoire sur la liberte de l'enseignement public' ['Memorandum on the Freedom of Public Education'] (1811), OC viii 268; *Quatres chapitres sur la Russie* [*Four Chapters on Russia*] (1811), OC viii 283, 311–12, 336, 345, 512–13.

[79] *Quatres chapitres sur la Russie* (previous note), OC viii 292.

[80] ibid., 288.

These are the people you must emulate. And whom do you have here? You have German Protestants and German scientists, who seek employment in your court and in your schools and in your universities. Why do these people come? These people come because they are a shiftless element. They come because they are not happy at home. Persons of good character who possess property, believe in law and order, and are virtuous citizens do not emigrate. Persons who emigrate have something wrong with them, and by allowing all these emigrants, by allowing all these persons who are evidently not happy at home, who are fidgety and are unable to establish themselves at home, you are simply importing a disintegrating element which in the end will prove the undoing of your great empire. I have spoken to a Prince of Germany who regretted the fact that various mutinous freethinkers were leaving his dominions, not so much because they were leaving his dominion as because of the terrible damage which they would do to the dominions of his cousin, the Emperor of Russia.

This was the kind of advice which Maistre gave. And he goes further than that, and he says: I know that there is a desire for science and enlightenment everywhere, but if you want stability, if you want peace, if you want order, if you want authority, if you want something which every state needs a minimum of, then my advice to you is, try to freeze it up, don't let it go too far forward. I know it cannot be stopped indefinitely, but at least you might slow it down. And this piece of advice was literally adopted by certain Russian statesmen towards the end of the nineteenth century; the phrase 'freeze it up'[81] was not irrelevantly used. They all argued that the unrest and disintegration in the European states, the general materialism and political instability of the bourgeois republics of the West, were largely due to this awful uncensored free thought which proceeded among them. And therefore in Russia they did their best, as we know, to try to slow down the process which they themselves rather pessimistically supposed could not be held up indefinitely.

[81] Untraced.

But that, at any rate, is Maistre's typical advice. He is quite interesting on a number of other topics as well, for example language, which brings him into line with Hamann and similar thinkers. He says: If you want to know where the repository of tradition lies, if you want to know where wisdom truly is, it is of course in language. Language encapsulates, language enshrines the whole tradition, all the accumulated wisdom, of an irrational kind, of our society and our race. Not any kind of language, of course. The people whom he most detested were the Encyclopedists. He says: M. Condorcet wants an international language so that scientists of one country might the better be able to understand the science of another. But an international language would shed precisely those peculiarities, precisely that accumulation of local, provincial, historical accretion which gives each language its unique quality and produces those words which shape our minds, which educationally shape us along those traditional lines along which natural development of human beings and societies must lie if they are to be traditional, if they are to be peaceful, if they are to have regard to their own past, if they are not to be left without ideals and without principles. And that is why they must learn Latin, not because it's a clear language, but, on the contrary, because it has a huge accumulation of superstition and prejudice – particularly medieval Latin – in it, which therefore acts as a shield against too much disintegrating influence by reason trying to make its way in from without.

This is precisely the kind of defence which Burke put up for prejudice and for superstitions – mainly for prejudice – namely, here are things which have lasted in time, here are things which have held up against the corrosive influence of criticism: these are the things to cling on to. This is the skin which we have historically formed. This is the bark of the tree: if you strip off the bark, no matter how unsightly it may appear, the tree will perish. And this is the great defence of tradition, superstition, prejudice, irrationality and, again, these crooked alleyways of life to which Hamann was so attached, and which Maistre in his own rather different way also defends. And he says: If we listen to what the philosophers say

about language, some very peculiar things emerge. You ask M. Condillac, for example, what are the origins of language. Well, of course M. Condillac says: Like everything else it is a product of the division of labour. This is simply a utilitarian device invented by people for the purpose of expressing themselves. What are we to think?, says Maistre. That the first generation of men said BA, and the second generation of men said BE? That the Assyrians invented the nominative, and the Medes invented the genitive?[82] This is a very typical Maistrean epigram on that subject. If that is not so, if this is not the way in which human society proceeds, if this is not done by conscious rationalism, by conscious division of labour, by people already illuminated from the beginning simply seeking to build some kind of life in terms of some kind of utility or in terms of some kind of search for common happiness, which Maistre profoundly believes not to be rooted in the psychology of men – if that is not so, then what *are* we to think of human society?

And he again comes back to two eternal propositions: one, that the source of authority must be dark, impenetrable and uncriticisable, that if questions are allowed to be asked, if you say, 'Why this institution?' and an answer is given, and then you say, 'What about this answer?' and another answer is given, and you ask about the why of the why of the why of the why, this is an indefinite process – an infinite process; and in the course of this infinite process everything topples and falls. Therefore darkness must protect the institutions of mankind. That is proposition number one.

Proposition number two – which follows from the first – is that we must never allow corrosive persons to penetrate into our midst. This is the 'sect'[83] – the 'secte détestable qui ne dort jamais'[84] – which made the French Revolution. Who are these people? Jacobins, socialists, liberals, scientists, Protestants, Jansenists, perfectibilians, Jews, Freemasons, atheists, freethinkers, those who

[82] SPD, 2nd Dialogue, OC iv 88.
[83] See note **78**.
[84] 'The hateful sect which never sleeps': loc. cit. (note **79**).

made the French Revolution, those who made the American Revolution. These are the people who in some way must be put down; if they are not put down, we are lost, because all society rests upon authority, and these people call authority into question. All society rests upon the curbing of reason, because if we don't curb reason, reason will destroy us.

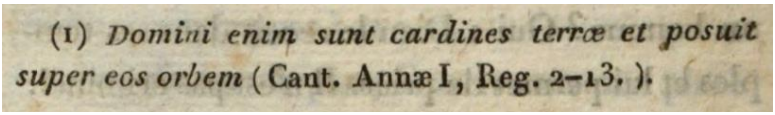
And then there follows the famous passage about the executioner, which is I suppose the most famous passage in the whole of Maistre's works, in the book which is called the *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* – the *Petersburg Evenings* – in which in some symbolic sense he tries to convey to you what it is that society rests on. It's an extremely exaggerated passage, but then, as I told you, thinkers make an impact only by wild exaggeration, and Maistre goes further than most. Let me read you this passage, in order to convey to you once again the kind of flavour, the kind of feeling, which Maistre had, and the sort of thing with which he tended to shock the rather conventional court of Cagliari. I have already told you about the fact that it seems to him mysterious that we respect soldiers – not just because they take risks or because they risk their lives or because they have nice characters – and don't respect the executioner, who performs the most useful of all social functions. He goes on:

> Who is this inexplicable being, who, when there are so many agreeable, lucrative, honest and even honourable professions to choose among, in which a man can exercise his skill or his powers, has chosen that of torturing or killing his own kind? This head, this heart, are they made like our own? Is there not something in them that is peculiar, and alien to our nature? Myself, I have no doubt about this. He is made like us externally. He is born like all of us. But he is an extraordinary being, and it needs a special decree to bring him into existence as a member of the human family – a *fiat* of the creative power […]. Hardly is he assigned to his proper dwelling place, hardly has he been put in possession of it, when others remove their homes elsewhere whence they can no longer see him. In the

midst of this desolation, in this sort of vacuum formed round him, he lives alone with his mate and his young, who alone acquaint him with the sound of the human voice: without which he would hear nothing but groans. … The gloomy signal is given; an abject servitor of justice knocks on his door to tell him he is wanted; he goes; he arrives in a public square covered by a dense, trembling mob. A poisoner, a parricide, a man who has committed sacrilege is tossed to him: he seizes him, stretches him, ties him to a horizontal cross, lifts his arms; there is a horrible silence; there is no sound but that of bones cracking under the bars, and the shrieks of the victim. He unties him. He puts him on the wheel; the shattered limbs are entangled in the spokes; the head hangs down; the hair stands up, and the mouth, gaping open like a furnace, from time to time emits only a few bloodstained words to beg for death. The executioner has finished. His heart is beating, but it is with joy: he congratulates himself, he says in his heart: *Nobody breaks men on the wheel better than I.* He steps down. He holds out his bloodstained hand, and there are justly thrown to him from a distance a few pieces of gold, which he catches through a double row of human beings standing back in horror. He sits down to table, and he eats. He goes to bed and he sleeps. And on the next day, when he wakes, he thinks of something totally different from what he did the day before. Is he a man? Yes. God receives him in his temples, and allows him to pray. He is not a criminal. Nevertheless no tongue dare declare *that he is virtuous, that he is an honest man, that he is estimable.* No moral praise is appropriate to him, for everyone else is assumed to have relations with human beings: he has none.

And yet all greatness, all power, all subordination rest on the executioner. He is the terror and he is the bond of human association. Remove this mysterious agent from the world, and in an instant order yields to chaos: thrones fall, society disappears. God, who has created sovereignty, has also made punishment; he has fixed the earth upon these two poles: *For*

Jehovah is master of the twin poles: and upon them he maketh turn the world. Kings 1. 2. 8.[85]


(1) *Domini enim sunt cardines terræ et posuit super eos orbem* (Cant. Annæ I, Reg. 2–13.).

This is a typical Maistrean passage, and all he means – because I don't think he ever did see an executioner do any of these things,[86] if the biographers are to be trusted – all that Maistre really means is something of this sort. No man can exist without society; no society exists without some degree of sovereignty. All sovereignty implies infallibility, and infallibility rests with God. Therefore the Pope must be the master of mankind. This is the root and centre of Maistre's ultramontanism, and the whole passage about the executioner is simply a highly dramatised way of saying that, unless there are sanctions, unless there is punishment, man will sin, man will rip other men to pieces. His imagination swings between two extremes – on one side extreme punishment, on one side terror, on the other side chaos. And that is what the French Revolution certainly did induce in him. And yet he doesn't believe, for example, in military government. He wants government to be traditional, he wants government to be ancient, he wants government to be established, and he wants it to be established in the poetry, the mythology, the imagination, the tradition, the irrational creative faculties of man: in his mythological and his poetical self, not by some kind of fiat, not by some kind of artificial Hobbesian sovereign. He is, for example, against what he calls 'la *Batonocratie*',[87] or rule of the stick. 'I have

[85] SPD, 1st Dialogue, OC iv 32–4. The closing quotation is from the Vulgate (in which the books of Samuel are called 1 and 2 Kings): *Domini enim sunt cardines terræ, et posuit super eos orbem* (1 Samuel 2:8). Maistre gives the Vulgate text and reference, using a variant verse-numbering in the first edition ('Cant. Annæ I, Reg. 2–13' ['Song of Hannah, 1 Kings 2:13']), in a footnote.

[86] But cf. p. **67** above.

[87] To Louis Amé Vignet, Baron des Étoles, 9 December 1793, OC ix 59.

always hated military government,' he says; 'I hate it now, and so long as I live I shall hate it.'[88]

His attitude towards Napoleon, for example, was ambiguous. On the one hand he was of course the Corsican monster, he was a usurper, he performed an act of utmost blasphemy by the hideous coronation by which he forced the Pope to crown him. He drove out the legitimate rulers of France. On the other hand, all power is from God, and Napoleon has power, and power is important. And Maistre lays down a proposition which didn't make him particularly popular in Cagliari. He says: No doubt the Jacobins were terrible people, but they saved France; no doubt the Jacobins were the scourge of God sent upon us, but in the chaos of France induced by the *philosophes* and Voltaire (he says it's quite right, 'Books have done it all';[89] it's these pamphlets of the *philosophes* which are really responsible for the dreadful disintegration of this great country), at least the Jacobins cut off heads. Anyone who cuts off heads asserts authority, anyone who asserts authority establishes order, and therefore the Jacobins are greater heroes in French history than Louis XVI, who was feeble and who played with liberals. Louis XIV crushed liberals, issued the edict of Nantes, expelled a great many Protestants, and died glorious in his bed. Louis XVI was liberal, played with the liberals, encouraged democracy, and we all know how he ended. Robespierre is a monster, he says, drunk with power and blood; nevertheless he was the instrument chosen by history to rescue France and defend her frontiers against external invasion. All power is always better than no power. And therefore Maistre is among the earliest European thinkers quite firmly to establish the proposition that all power is to be worshipped, all power is admirable. Every form of human coercion has for its end

[88] ibid. 58.

[89] Voltaire had written 'Les livres ont tout fait' ['Books have done it all'] in 'Epître au roi de Danemark, Christian VII, sur la liberté de la presse accordée dans tous ses états' ['Epistle to the King of Denmark, Christian VII, on the Freedom of the Press Granted in All His Dominions'] (1771): *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* [*Complete Works of Voltaire*], [ed. Louis Moland] (Paris, 1877–85), x 427.

the preservation of that degree of minimum human order without which men become sinful, become chaotic and become self-destructive. And the fact that he should have said this about the Jacobins, as I say, did not endear him to his royalist colleagues.

He wanted to meet Napoleon, and he wrote to the court at Cagliari saying he wished to meet him, because Napoleon had expressed a desire to meet *him*. Napoleon was fascinated by his works, thought he had the root of the matter in him, and wished to meet this intelligent and interesting counter-revolutionary. Maistre wrote to the court; the court was extremely shocked. The King wrote back and said that on no account could he conceive that a loyal subject of his could possibly meet the bloodstained usurper. Maistre wrote back saying: I shall always be loyal to your majesty, I shall never contravene any orders you give me, and if you forbid me to meet Napoleon, I shall never meet him. But you confess yourself surprised by my attitude: not to surprise you I cannot promise. And this is the kind of dispatch which made the court of Cagliari regard him as a somewhat uncomfortable ally.

Towards the end of his life Maistre wrote *The Petersburg Soirées*, which were published after his death. And they became a kind of bible to non-Christian Catholics in France. The proportion of Christianity in Maistre's writings cannot be regarded as high. He pretends that he derives his propositions from St Thomas, he pretends that he derives his propositions from all forms of scholastic logic, or the doctrines of the Roman Church, but in fact, of course, as one can see from the quotations which I have given, which are not at all uncharacteristic, he is not what he is usually represented in the histories of political thought to be. He is not a proud, indomitable aristocrat standing on the frontiers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries looking back towards some kind of imaginary past, a tragic figure resisting change which is inevitable, dignified, blind, reactionary, a classical profile of the last patrician, about to be knocked down by the furious bourgeois mob. That is a normal view of him even on the part of those who favour him: the last of the Romans, as it were. Émile Faguet says he is like a Roman of the fifth century before the final invasion

overthrew them. The general notion is that he is somehow out of date, that he is the last defender of a completely outworn order, a man tragically concentrated upon a partly imaginary but no longer restorable past.

This I believe to be a false account. Maistre is far more a harbinger, alas, of the future than he seems to me to be in any sense a reconstructer of the past. The hysteria of his writings, the dwelling on blood, the view of man as possessed by irrational instincts, the darkness, the proposition that it is fundamentally the irrational and the uncontrollable which are in charge of men; the view that the analysis of the Encyclopedists is shallow because they don't take account of the human desire for self-immolation, of the human desire for destruction, of the whole bundle of irrational impulses of which man is to a large extent composed, and the proposition that only by in some way exploiting these, certainly by taking notice of them but also in some way by directing them, by canalising them, by disciplining them, by making use of them, but above all by looking them in the face – that only in this way can human society survive; the extreme contempt for liberals and democrats, the view that human beings are totally unfit to govern themselves, the view that human beings must always be governed by small oligarchical elites, which must be groups of self-sacrificing men trying to tie up this terrible tiger with the utmost effort, which gives them no pleasure at all, any more than the executioner takes pleasure in his executions; the notion that human society can persist only if a few self-sacrificing men are just able to rein in this monstrous beast, and must do so by appealing not to his rational self, which is weak, but to his irrational self, which is dominant, and must in some way direct it towards ends not intelligible to him but intelligible to those who direct him – this view, which is of course the view of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, doesn't appear to me to be an eighteenth-century view at all – neither progressive nor reactionary, neither liberal nor conservative, certainly very remote from Burke, by whom he was supposed to have been inspired, and totally unrelated to Thomism or the official Catholic political philosophy of that or, officially, of

any other time. And in this respect I think he is a proto-Fascist. I think it's reasonable to say that the particular stress upon the seamy side, upon the black side, of human nature does qualify him to be so described. That, I think, is his vision.

Let me try to sum him up, finally. His merits are that he is genuinely capable of seeing through hollow abstractions, that he is genuinely capable of understanding the role which myths and the irrational play in human life; that he understands that among the motives which move men is this desire for self-immolation, is the desire for aggression, is the desire for self-destruction, which is as much part of human history as the nobler and more rational impulses to which the Encyclopedists appealed. He understands, in other words, all the things which the Fascist psychologists were able in fact to exploit to so successful a degree. In short, if we only read the Encyclopedists, we ought to be unable to explain the phenomenon of Fascism. If we read Maistre we can at least explain it, whatever our attitude towards it might be.

He contradicts himself a thousand times. He says, for example, that all constitutions must be lived, they cannot be written, because whatever is written perishes, and therefore the English constitution is the best, because it's not been written down. Everything which is written down in laws and enactments must perish because this is done by human intelligence, by clerks, by people who use the feeble categories of the human intellect instead of thinking with the blood – which is there very strongly in Maistre. Well, he says that. On the other hand he also tells you that the Turks have survived so long because they have all believed in the Koran, that the Chinese have survived so long because they repeat the apophthegms of Confucius, which presumably are written down, that Christianity has survived for so long because it has dedicated itself to the eternal truths of the Bible. These two propositions are not compatible with one another. He says that the only countries which own the true faith, only Catholic countries, can survive, because only in Catholic countries is authority understood. Elsewhere, mutinies break out: Calvin, Luther – these are the real authors of the French Revolution, the people who trusted in

individual judgement. On the other hand, he agrees that England appears fairly stable in his day, and he says: It's a miracle. The definition of a miracle is something which contradicts something which on other grounds one knows to be universally true, which again is not the most powerful of arguments. To regard something as miraculous merely because you have taken something to be a law which the exception in fact refutes is not the most powerful of logical instruments.

And there are many other contradictions of a similar type, which I needn't go into, which are relatively unimportant. The general pattern of his views is fairly clear. What *can* be said about Maistre is that he violently and vastly exaggerated, which is precisely what I have tried to say about Hamann too; that if it were true that men were as he describes them as being, that if all we had in the world was crime and punishment, that if men always oscillated between the most ghastly and bloodstained terror on the one hand, which was the only instrument which prevented them from total self-demolition and chaos on the other, then human history is even more unintelligible than he thinks Voltaire makes it out to be; and therefore that his psychology and his sociology are just as lopsided as that of the most superficial, the most rosy-spectacled, the most idealistic and starry-eyed of the idealists of the eighteenth century, whom he regards with such contempt and hatred. But I think this can be said for Maistre: that he did attract people's attention to the black aspects of individual and social life, that if rational behaviour is to occur at all, then reality must be looked at as it is, and not as it is desired to be, and that if self-understanding is of any importance, then Maistre undoubtedly did bring out, in a manner which was extremely bold and unusual in his day, those huge, socially irrational factors which afterwards people like Marx and Freud wrote about, those aspects of human life which certainly were not suspected or dreamt of in most of the writings of the eighteenth century; and in this respect he did render a service to mankind. That is to say, after Maistre it was no longer possible to write about social life as it was written about in the eighteenth century.

And it wasn't was only the French Revolution which did that, because we find a great deal of writing on the part of people like Comte, on the part of people like Fourier, for example, certainly on the part of people like Macaulay, even on the part of people like John Stuart Mill, which takes no notice of these things, or takes very little notice of them. And in this respect, when you read Maistre, when you read one of these tragic and violent and hysterical and sometimes fantastic descriptions of human folly, of human degradation, of human misery, of human irrationality, which he stresses, you feel that you are reading a far more contemporary author than if you are reading Macaulay or if you are reading Mill or if you are reading Fourier, or any of the other authors either contemporary with or shortly after Maistre. And in this sense he is a kind of modern thinker: he is a modern thinker because he really did rip open certain aspects of social reality which certainly were only hinted at obscurely before, and were certainly never presented with the harshness and the vivacious and dramatic force which Maistre was able to impart to them. That, I think, is ultimately his service.

He is regarded by most French writers on him as a marvellous and logical mind, capable of deducing all kinds of extremely paradoxical and disagreeable propositions by ironclad logic from very lucid premisses. This seems to me totally false. There is not much logic in Maistre, there is not much argument; all there is is a vivacious imagination and an extreme desire to show up and expose the enemy. The enemy is Voltaire, the enemy is Rousseau, the enemy is Holbach, the enemy is Helvétius, Condillac and Condorcet. Whenever he comes across their writings, he writes with a kind of dramatic violence and a kind of passion, which really does arm his sight with a kind of special hatred – which is also a quality which I attributed to Hamann – which really does throw a kind of gloomy light upon a scene not perhaps adequately illuminated by the more rational and the more benevolent thinkers.

As a final word, to be said both in the case of Hamann and in the case of Maistre: Their importance resides in two things. First of all, in revealing irrational, chaotic, disagreeable aspects of both

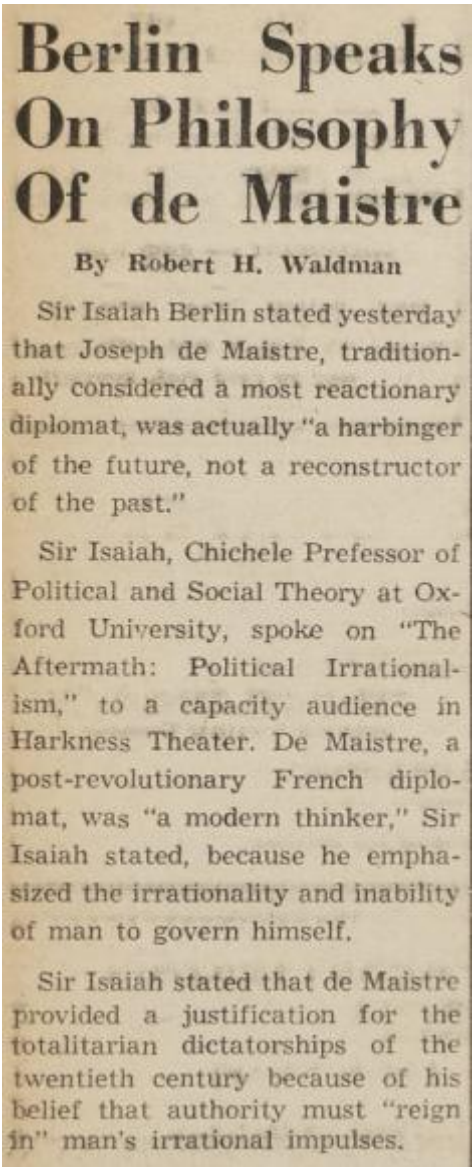
individual and social existence not taken care of in the symmetrical and rationalistic, I won't say rational, but at any rate the elegant constructions of the typical eighteenth-century Enlightenment. That is one. And secondly, both these men had a considerable influence upon behaviour, and deserve study as such: Hamann in the particular note of irrationality which he injected into German Romanticism and, by indirection, various movements which grew out of it – various forms of nationalism and so forth which grew out of it – and Maistre by painting a picture of man which thereupon became the vade mecum of every reactionary and indeed every Fascist movement in the world.

One final remark I wish to make. The Saint-Simonian movement in 1830 rather mysteriously observed – the Saint-Simonian *Exposition* said – what is really desired is a combination of Voltaire and Maistre.[90] This, on the face of it, seems somewhat paradoxical: Voltaire, the friend of life, the friend of liberty, the friend of man; Maistre, the executioner, blood, darkness, irrationality, horror. What they meant was not altogether absurd. They wanted to say that Voltaire was a very dry and ironical thinker who thought poorly of mankind, and on the whole was not sentimental: he stripped away a good many illusions. Man as he painted him was not entirely attractive; no doubt his persecutors were even less so, but man as painted by Voltaire was a dry etching, and he removed from him all kinds of handsome attributes with which more optimistic or more charitable thinkers had clothed him before. This man needed some kind of advice about how to proceed; Maistre provided the kind of machinery with which this poor creature as drawn by Voltaire could alone be governed. What I think none of these thinkers had foreseen was the possibility of the combination of irrationalism and science. For Maistre, of course, science is the opposite of irrationalism, and therefore

[90] *Doctrine de Saint-Simon, Première Année, Exposition, 1829* [*The Doctrine of Saint-Simon, First Year, Exposition, 1829*] (Paris, 1830), 268: 'tâchez de rester juges impartiaux entre de Maistre; et Voltaire' ['try to remain impartial judges between Maistre and Voltaire'].

anyone who is scientific is bound to disintegrate the country in which he lives by resisting, or not allowing to grow, those healthy irrational forces round which society must grow, as a tree; the proposition that irrational movements – nationalism, chauvinism, totalitarianism of the right or the left – can come armed with science is a particular nightmare which even Maistre never dreamt of. Nevertheless, he did provide the material out of which ultimately it could be constructed.

4 The Aftermath: Political Irrationalism



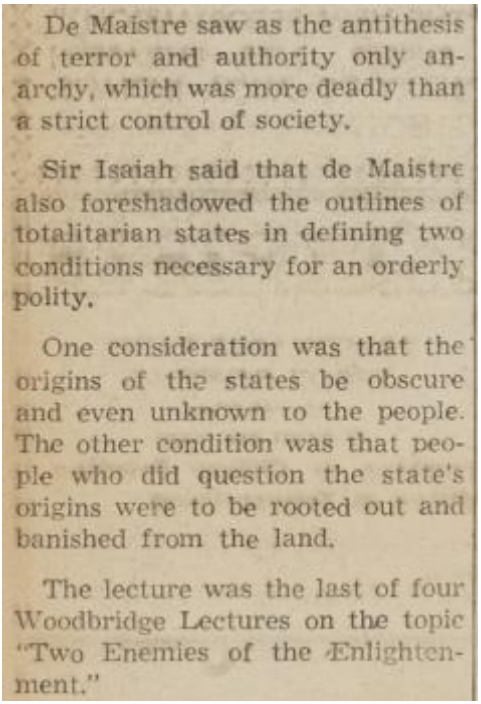
Berlin Speaks On Philosophy Of de Maistre

By Robert H. Waldman

Sir Isaiah Berlin stated yesterday that Joseph de Maistre, traditionally considered a most reactionary diplomat, was actually "a harbinger of the future, not a reconstructor of the past."

Sir Isaiah, Chichele Prefessor of Political and Social Theory at Oxford University, spoke on "The Aftermath: Political Irrationalism," to a capacity audience in Harkness Theater. De Maistre, a post-revolutionary French diplomat, was "a modern thinker," Sir Isaiah stated, because he emphasized the irrationality and inability of man to govern himself.

Sir Isaiah stated that de Maistre provided a justification for the totalitarian dictatorships of the twentieth century because of his belief that authority must "reign in" man's irrational impulses.



De Maistre saw as the antithesis of terror and authority only anarchy, which was more deadly than a strict control of society.

Sir Isaiah said that de Maistre also foreshadowed the outlines of totalitarian states in defining two conditions necessary for an orderly polity.

One consideration was that the origins of the states be obscure and even unknown to the people. The other condition was that people who did question the state's origins were to be rooted out and banished from the land.

The lecture was the last of four Woodbridge Lectures on the topic "Two Enemies of the Enlightenment."

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Columbia Daily Spectator, 29 October 1965, 3

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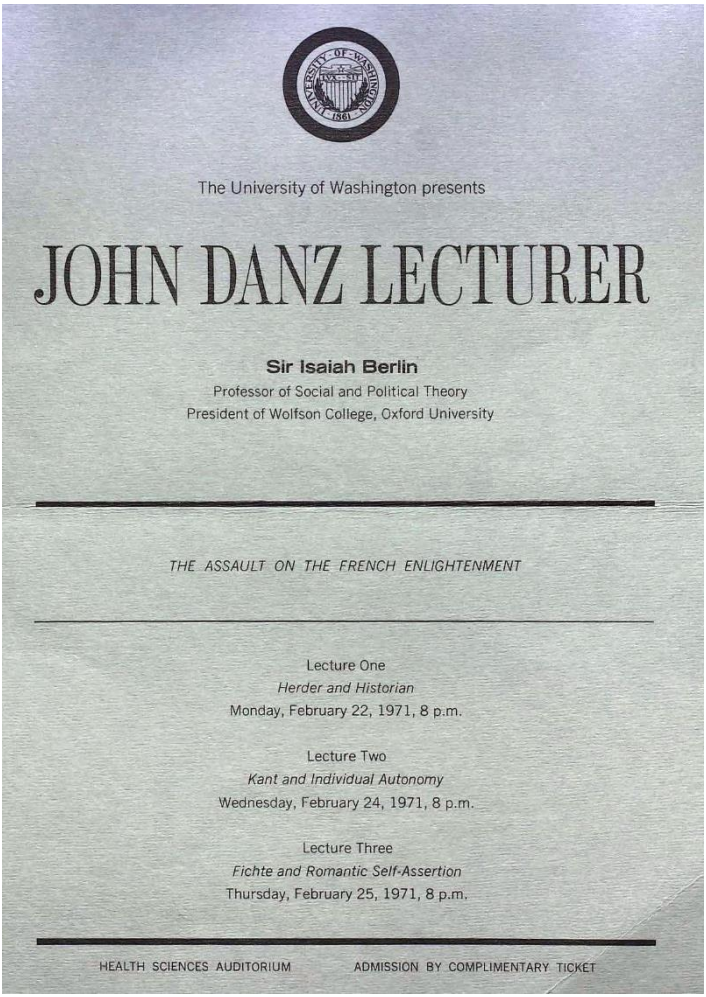
The Assault on the French Enlightenment

These three John Danz Lectures were delivered and recorded on tape on 22, 24 and 25 February 1971 at the University of Washington in Seattle. 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**, 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.

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

THE ASSAULT ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

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.

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:

John Danz Lecturer	*Title*
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
John Danz Visiting Professor	
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

SOLOMON KATZ[1] 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.

[1] Solomon Katz (1909–90), professor of history, University of Washington.

[…] he takes as his natural province issues that are of universal contemporary interest.'[1]

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,[2] 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',[3] 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

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

[2] In fact his tenure of that chair ended in 1967.

[3] An article rather than a book.

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 the n, 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?'[1] 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*,[2] universal answers true of all men at all times, in all places – cannot be quite right, because men differ, because circumstances differ.

[1] 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.

[2] 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.[1] 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

[1] *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, be 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[1] 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

[1] 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 a 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 its 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.[1] 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

[1] 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 is 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.'[1] 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

[1] 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,[1] 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

[1] 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.[1] 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

[1] '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 ar e 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 Messiad*, 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.[1] 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.

[1] '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[1] 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.

[1] 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 *Volksseele 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.

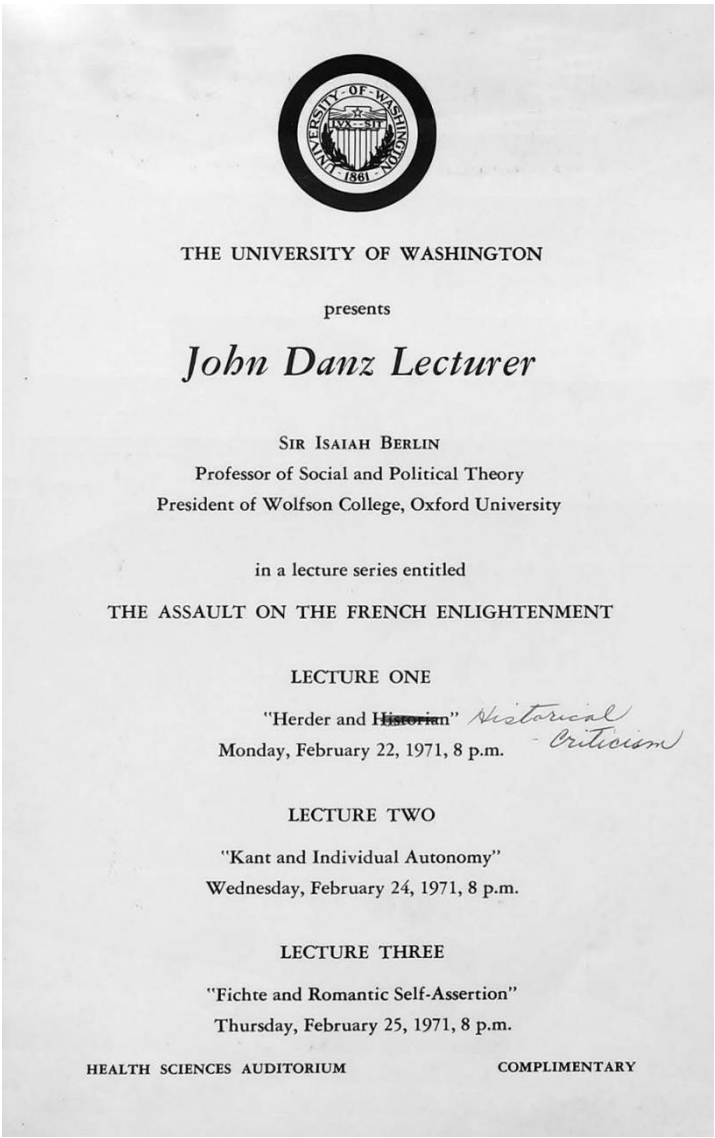
That is the first attack upon the universality and the cosmopolitanism, and what Herder regarded as the dehumanising, depersonalising, excessively abstract, excessively general tendency of French thinkers who did not understand what it was to wish to express the inner life, because they had no inner 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.

*

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.



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 Criticism"
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.

HEALTH SCIENCES AUDITORIUM COMPLIMENTARY

Leaflet with corrected title for the first lecture

Sir Isaiah Berlin

past

Sir Isaiah Berlin, Professor of Social and Political Theory and President of Wolfson College, Oxford University, was born June 6, ~~1906~~ 1909, in Riga, Latvia. His parents took him to Britain in 1920.

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 Britsh Embassy in Washington from 1942 through 1945. After the war, he also served briefly with the British Embassy in Moscow.

He is ~~the past~~ a 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

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

OTIS A. PEASE[1] 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'.[2] 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.

[1] Otis Arnold Pease (1925–2010), professor of history and department chair, University of Washington.

[2] **https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:80444/xv835505**.

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,[1] 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.[2]

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.

ISAIAH 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

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

[2] 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*[1] – 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

[1] '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.[1]

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-

[1] '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?',[1] 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'.[2]

[1] Its full title is 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?' ('Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?') (1784)

[2] '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 Monatsschrift* 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.'[1] Rousseau's whole 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.'[2] 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,

[1] 'Von der Freyheit' ['On Freedom'], in 'Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen' ['Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'] (1764–5), first published (with slightly different wording) in *Immanuel Kant's Sämmtliche 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.

[2] '[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.

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 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.'[1] 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'.[2] Well, perhaps they

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

[2] *Kritik der reine 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

were real; perhaps all there was, was the world as a kind of tremendous treadmill in which one thing followed another with an 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'.[1] 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*'.[2] 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.'[3]

Vernunft' ['Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason'], 122; **KGS** v 101, line 7.

[1] **KRV** A466/B494.

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

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

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 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'.[1] 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

[1] 'Elender Behelf', **KPV**] 116; **KGS** 96, line 15.

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 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 is 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',[1] mere '*bawling* upon paper'.[2] 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

[1] '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.

[2] 'Observations on the Draughts of Declarations-of-Rights Presented to the Committee of the Constitution of the National Assembly of France' (1789), ibid., 187.

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 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.[1] He

[1] 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 InteLex Past Masters, unhelpfully titled *Gesammelte*

is absolutely intoxicated with the mere word 'freedom', which somehow means everything to him – above all, the power of

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 occured, 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 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.

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',[1] blind natural necessity, the forces of nature, like emotions or instincts, as well as 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.'[2] And then something even more daring. 'Not even the Almighty can end our autonomy, not even he determines our will against our principles',[3] good or bad, virtuous or vicious. 'All other things must; man is the being who wills.'[4] He is 'subject to laws neither of nature nor of reason'.[5] 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.'[6] 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 he 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

[1] **UAEM**, letter 14, ***Die Horen*** 1 No. 2, 80; **SSW** 350.
[2] **UAW** 167; **SSW** 194.
[3] **VE** 342; **SSW** 236.
[4] **UE** 3; **SSW** 571.
[5] **UAEM**, letter 23, 85; **SSW** 384. Cf. **UAW** 195; **SSW** 208.
[6] **UE** 33; **SSW** 583. IB's misleadingly loose version has been somewhat improved with wording from RR2 93.

grovels upon the ground, bound with chains, strewn with flowers, as Rousseau has it,[1] and says he is perfectly comfortable in them 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,[2] 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',[3] 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[4] – 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.'[5] 'Art is the Tree of Life. […] Science is the Tree of Death'[6] – 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

[1] 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'.

[2] 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 Phaethon's demise (**SSW** i 122).

[3] 'Auguries of Innocence' (1803), lines 5–6: *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr (Oxford, 1978) (hereafter Bentley) ii 1312.

[4] Cf. TCE2 381.

[5] *The First Book of Urizen*, plate 28, lines 4–7: **Bentley** i 282.

[6] 'Laocoon' (1820?), aphorisms 16, 17, 19, **Bentley** i 665–6.

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 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*:[1] I don't think it's actually Euripides' *Medea*, it's

[1] 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

the *Medea* written in the seventeenth century; it's Corneille's *Medea*, in fact, he's talking about.[1] 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,[2] 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,[3] to Jason, who is a perfectly nice man, doesn't kill anybody at all, just an ordinary, no doubt, middle-class

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.

[1] 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.

[2] He was the son of Aeson, King of Iolcos in Thessaly.

[3] Apparently not: IB credits Schiller with his own comparison.

Athenian,[1] 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; 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

[1] See note **2** above.

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 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[141] 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

[141] 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.

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[142] is what affected the imagination of his contemporaries.

[142] The three stages are 'physicher', 'ästhetischer' and 'moralischer' ('physical', 'aesthetic' and 'moral'): **UAEM**, letter 24, 86; SSW 384.

He discriminated three stages. First what he called the savage[143] stage, 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

[143] Schiller refers to man's 'savage life' ('wilde Leben') in the first stage: ibid.

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[144] – if you ask at what particular point this notion emerged, it has to be placed, it seems to me, between 1768 and 1783.[145] I will tell you why.

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

[144] E.g. in 'Tragödie und Komödie' ['Tragedy and Comedy'], **PS** 303.

[145] 1783 is the year in which *Fiesco* (see below) was published.

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 heroof 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.[146]

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

[146] 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.

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 assertup 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 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.[147] 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.


Versuch
einer
Critik aller Offenbarung.
Königsberg 1792.
Im Verlag der Hartungschen Buchhandlung.

[147] *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.[148] Fichte says, in effect, 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 –

[148] 'Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung' ['Logical-Philosophical Treatise'], in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* [*Annals of Natural Philosophy*], 14 Nos 3–4 (December 1921), 6.43, 261.

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 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',[149] 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.'[150] 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.

[149] A misrembering of 'im Anfang war die *That*': Goethe, *Faust: eine Tragödie* (Tübingen, 1808), part 1, 81 ('That' is an archaic spelling of 'Tat').

[150] All references are to *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämmtliche 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.

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 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.'[151] 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

[151] **VM**: **SW** ii 318.

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.'[152] Kant never said that: he never actually said 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

[152] **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.'

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?[153] 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,

[153] 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.

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 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.'[154] And he goes on to say, 'Man shall be and do something'[155] – 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.'[156] 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

[154] **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.'

[155] '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.

[156] ibid., lecture 1, SW vi 299.

everything which is not ourselves, our pure ego',[157] whatever that might be. 'So act that you can look on the dictate of your will as a[n eternal] law for you.'[158] '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.'[159] 'Man shall determine himself and never allow anything foreign to determine him. He should be what he is because he wills it';[160] 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.'[161] Again, 'I am not determined by the end, I determine it.'[162]

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.'[163] 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

[157] *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urteile 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.

[158] **VS** lecture 1, **SW** vi 297.

[159] 'Ueber Errichtung des Vernunftreiches' ['On the Establishment of the Kingdom of Reason'], **SW** vii 574.

[160] loc. cit., **89** note **158** above.

[161] loc. cit, **89** note **154** above (running two non-consecutive sentences together).

[162] loc. cit., **85** note **152** above (differently translated).

[163] 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.

believe different things because they have different characters.[164] 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.'[165] 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 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'[166] – 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.'[167] '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.'[168] And he goes on from there to say: 'Man may not make a rational being either virtuous or wise or happy against his will.'[169] This, as you can see, is a doctrine of extreme individualism. The

[164] '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.

[165] loc. cit., **89** note **154** above.

[166] **VM**, book 3, SW ii 288.

[167] **CCPO**, **SW** vi 82.

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

[169] **VS**, lecture 2, **SW** vi 309.

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, 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'[170] – because life is activity, it isn't passive. The worst of all things is passive contemplation: that's enslavement – that's sheer miserable 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

[170] '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.

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.'[171] 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.'[172] 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,[173] and so on. He is born into a society[174] – 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

[171] *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.

[172] **VS**, lecture 3: **SW** vi 306.

[173] John Donne, 'No man is an *Iland*', *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (London, 1624), 394.

[174] **VS**, lecture 3: **SW** vi 319.

some respect the perfection of the race which has done so much for him.'[175] That is now his new *Beruf*,[176] 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 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.'[177] 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,

[175] ibid.
[176] 'Calling'.
[177] **GN**, part 2: **SW** iii 208.

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 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*[178] of Fichte; this is the famous idea that only in a state which is protected against buffetings 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

[178] 'Closed Commercial State'.

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 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'.[179] 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.

[179] *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.

They are selected 'from among the individuals'.[180] 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.'[181] 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 Lycurgus, 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 artistic plan; if all the parts must subserve 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.'[182] This is going rather further. If

[180] ibid.

[181] [*The Characteristics of the Present Age*] (1806; GGZ), lecture 10, **SW** vii 144.

[182] *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.

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 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';[183] and then goes one step further: 'The individual

[183] **GGZ**, lecture 3, **SW** vii 35.

doesn't exist; he […] must vanish […]. The group – the *Gattung* – alone exists. Only the group is real.'[184] 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 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

[184] ibid., **SW** vii 37–8.

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.[185]

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 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

[185] '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.

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'[186] – which is a reference to St Paul.[187]

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 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.

[186] *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).

[187] '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.

'The people has the metaphysical right to realise its destiny by every weapon of cunning or force',[188] 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.[189] 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.[190] 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.

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.'[191] This is a very worthy sentiment, which both Hegel and Marx both expressed, particularly Marx.

[188] 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?

[189] **VM**, loc. cit. (**84**, note **150**), 269.

[190] ibid. (paraphrase).

[191] ibid. 277.

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. 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.[192]

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

[192] **RDN**, Seventh Address, **SW** vii 374. IB's translation is very free, and the last sentence is a compressed paraphrase.

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.'[193]

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.'[194] The prince is raised above the laws of individual ethics to a far higher level.

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

[193] ibid. 375.

[194] 'Aus dem Entwurfe zu einer politischen Schrift im Frühlinge 1813' ['From the Draft of a Political Pamphlet in Spring 1813'], ibid. 565.

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 himself. 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*[195] 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, 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

[195] 'Rule of law'.

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.[196]

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 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.'[197] And who shall say – who shall say that he was altogether mistaken?

`[196] 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay': Alfred Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall' (1842), line 184.

[197] 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*

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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.