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Essays in THE PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

by Walter Lippmann

A MENTOR BOOK
Published by THE NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

1955

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Adversaries of Liberal Democracy

1. *Liberalism and Jacobinism*

WE ARE living in a time of massive popular counter-revolution against liberal democracy. It is a reaction to the failure of the West to cope with the miseries and anxieties of the Twentieth Century. The liberal democracies have been tried and found wanting—found wanting not only in their capacity to govern successfully in this period of wars and upheavals, but also in their ability to defend and maintain the political philosophy that underlies the liberal way of life.

If we go back to the beginnings of the modern democratic movements in the eighteenth century, we can distinguish two diverging lines of development. The one is a way of progress in liberal constitutional democracy. The other is a morbid course of development into totalitarian conditions.[1]

One of the first to realize what was happening was Alexis de Tocqueville. He foresaw that the "democratic nations are menaced" by a "species of oppression . . . unlike anything that ever before existed in the world." But what is more, he discerned the original difference between the healthy and the morbid development of democracy.

In 1833, after his voyage in America, where he had foreseen the threat of mass democracy, de Tocqueville visited England.[2] There he was impressed with the contrast between the attitude of the English aristocracy,

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[1] Cf. J. C. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy.*

[2] De Tocqueville did not write a book on England, as he had already written one on America and was later to write one on France. His views on England were not accessible until recently, when Miss Ada Zemach published her study, *Alexis de Tocqueville on England*, in the *Review of Politics* for July 1951, Vol. 13, No. 3. This valuable paper is collated from de Tocqueville's correspondence and notes. Miss Zemach says that "unlike his views on Amer-

which was just in the way of accommodating itself to a newly enfranchised mass of voters, and the French *noblesse* of the *Ancien Régime.*

He went on to reflect that

> . . . from an early time a fundamental difference existed between the behavior of the governing classes in England and in France. The nobility, the cornerstone of medieval society, revealed in England a peculiar ability to merge and mix with other social groups, while in France it tended, on the contrary, to close its ranks and preserve its original purity of birth.
>
> In the earlier Middle Ages all Western Europe had a similar social system. But some time in the Middle Ages, one cannot say exactly when, a change pregnant with tremendous consequences occurred in the British Isles and in the British Isles only—the English nobility developed into an open aristocracy while the continental *noblesse* stubbornly remained within the rigid limits of a caste.

This, observes de Tocqueville, is the most revolutionary fact in English history, and he claims to have been the first to observe its importance and to grasp its full significance. It is, truly, a deep and illuminating observation on the conditions which are favorable to a healthy and progressive evolution of democracy and on the conditions which make it morbid and degenerative. The crucial difference is between what we might call enfranchisement by assimilation into the governing class, as exemplified in England, and, *per contra,* enfranchisement by the overthrow and displacing of the governing class as exemplified in France. In the one the government remains but becomes more responsible and more responsive; in the other, the government is overthrown with the liquidation of the governing class.

Although the two ways of evolution appear to have the same object—a society with free institutions under popu-

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ica and France, which are carefully stated in special books written at great length and in elaborate form, his ideas about England are more impressionistic in nature, scattered as they are in no particular order among volumes of correspondence, sometimes appearing in a bunch in the *Journal de Voyage*, sometimes as sudden asides in the big systematic works, emphasizing and defining a certain trend of thought by way of comparison and opposition."

lar government—they are radically different and they arrive at radically different ends.

The first way, that of assimilation, presumes the existence of a state which is already constitutional in principle, which is under laws that are no longer arbitrary, though they may be unjust and unequal. Into this constitutional state more and more people are admitted to the governing class and to the voting electorate. The unequal and the unjust laws are revised until eventually all the people have equal opportunities to enter the government and to be represented. Broadly speaking, this has been the working theory of the British movement towards a democratic society at home and also in the Commonwealth and Empire. This, too, was the working theory of the principal authors of the American Constitution, and this was how —though few of them welcomed it—they envisaged the enfranchisement of the whole adult population.

The other way is that of the Jacobin revolution. The people rise to power by overthrowing the ruling class and by liquidating its privileges and prerogatives. This is the doctrine of democratic revolution which was developed by French thinkers in the eighteenth century and was put into practice by the Jacobin party in the French Revolution. In its English incarnation the doctrine became known as Radicalism. In America, though it had its early disciples, notably Tom Paine, not until the era of the Founding Fathers was over, not until the era of Andrew Jackson, did the Jacobin doctrine become the popular political creed of the American democracy.

The Jacobin philosophy rests on a view of human society which the encyclopedist, Holbach, stated in this way:

> We see on the face of the globe only incapable, unjust sovereigns, enervated by luxury, corrupted by flattery, depraved through unpunished license, and without talent, morals, or good qualities.[3]

What Holbach had, in fact, seen on the face of the globe was the French court—then the most powerful in Europe and the paragon of all the lesser courts. When he was writing, it would have been difficult for anyone on the continent of Europe to imagine a king and a ruling class

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[3] Cited in Hippolyte A. Taine, *The Ancient Régime* (1888), p. 220.

who were not, like those he saw living at the Court of Versailles, exclusive and incompetent, corrupt, unteachable and unconcerned.

> "Would you know the story in brief, of almost all our wretchedness?" asked Diderot. "Here it is. There existed the natural man, and into this man was introduced an artificial man, whereupon a civil war arose within him lasting through life . . . If you propose to become a tyrant over him, . . . do your best to poison him with a theory of morals against nature; impose every kind of fetter on him; embarrass his movements with a thousand obstacles; place phantoms around him to frighten him. Would you see him happy and free? Do not meddle with his affairs. . . . I appeal to every civil, religious and political institution; examine these closely, and, if I am not mistaken, you will find the human species, century after century, subject to a yoke which a mere handful of knaves chose to impose on it. . . . Be wary of him who seeks to establish order; to order is to obtain the mastery of others by giving them trouble.[4]

If we compare the mood of this passage with that of the Declaration of Independence, the work of the other brand of revolutionists, we must be struck by the nihilism of Diderot. Diderot had been exasperated to a blind destructive despair by the rigidity of the French governing caste. He could not feel that there was anything to be done with any government, judging by the one he suffered under, except to abolish it.

Jefferson and his colleagues, on the other hand, were interested in government. They were in rebellion because they were being denied the rights of representation and of participation which they, like other subjects of the same King, would have enjoyed had they lived in England. The Americans were in rebellion against the "usurpations" of George III, not against authority as such but against the abuse of authority. The American revolutionists had in fact participated in the colonial governments. They intended to play leading parts, as indeed they did, in the new government. Far from wishing to overthrow the authority of government, or to deny and subvert, as Diderot did, the moral foundations of authority, they went into rebellion first in order to gain admittance into, and then to take possession of, the organs of government.

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[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

When they declared that "a prince (George III) whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people," they were not saying that there was *no one* who was fit to be the ruler of a free people. They were imbued with the English idea that the governing class must learn to share its special prerogatives by admitting new members. The American Revolutionists were themselves the new members who had been unjustly, in fact illegally, excluded from the government of the colonies. They themselves meant to govern the colonies after they had overthrown the government of the King. They were not nihilists to whom the revolutionary act of overthrowing the sovereign is the climax and consummation of everything.

2. *The Paradigm of Revolution*

Of the two rival philosophies, the Jacobin is almost everywhere in the ascendant. It is a ready philosophy for men who, previously excluded from the ruling class, and recently enfranchised, have no part in the business of governing the state, and no personal expectation of being called upon to assume the responsibilities of office. The Jacobin doctrine is an obvious reaction, as de Tocqueville's observation explains, to government by a caste. When there is no opening for the gradualness of reform and for enfranchisement by assimilation, a revolutionary collision is most likely.

The Jacobin doctrine is addressed to the revolutionary collision between the inviolable governing caste and the excluded men claiming the redress of their grievances and their place in the sun. Though it professes to be a political philosophy, the doctrine is not, in fact, a philosophy of government. It is a gospel and also a strategy for revolution. It announces the promise that the crusade which is to overthrow the ruling caste will by the act of revolution create a good society.

The peculiar essence of the dogma is that the revolution itself is the creative act. Towards the revolution as such, because it is the culmination and the climax, all the labor and the sacrifice of the struggle are to be directed. The revolutionary act will remove the causes of evil in

human society. Again and again it has been proved how effective is this formula for arousing, sustaining and organizing men's energies for revolution: to declare that evil in society has been imposed upon the many by the few—by priests, nobles, capitalists, imperialists, liberals, aliens—and that evil will disappear when the many who are pure have removed these few who are evil.

The summons to revolution in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 uses the same formula as the Jacobins had used a half century earlier. Marx and Engels were men steeped in the Western revolutionary tradition, and habituated, therefore, to the notion that the act of revolution removes the source of evil and creates the perfect society. The French Revolution had not made this perfect society. For by 1848 there were the capitalist oppressors. Marx and Engels called for the next revolutionary act, announcing that now the Third Estate, the bourgeois capitalists, needed to go the way of the liquidated nobles and clergy.

This is the formula: that when the revolution of the masses is victorious over the few, there will exist the classless society without coercion and violence and with freedom for all. This formula reappears whenever conditions are revolutionary—that is to say, when necessary reforms are being refused. The formula is the strategy of rebellion of those who are unable to obtain the redress of grievances. The rulers are to be attacked. So they are isolated. They are few. So they are not invincible. They bear the total guilt of all the sufferings and grievances of men. To remove them is then to cure all evil. Therefore, their overthrow, which is feasible, will be worth every sacrifice. Since the world will be good when the evil few have been overthrown, there is no need for the doubts and the disputes which would arise among the revolutionists if they had to make serious practical decisions on the problems of the post-revolutionary world.

"You are summoned," said Barrère to the National Assembly, "to give history a fresh start." [5] This was to be done by stripping off, as Taine puts it, the garments of the artificial man, all those fictitious qualities which make him "ecclesiastic or layman, noble or plebeian, sovereign or subject, proprietor or proletarian, ignorant or cultivated." The established authorities who have made man wear these garments for their selfish and sinister ends must go. The

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

authorities must go, the garments must be removed, and then there will be left "man in himself, the same under all conditions, in all situations, in all countries, in all ages."

These natural men would be very different from the fallen and deformed wretches who now inhabit the world. They would be Adam before he fell—Adam who fell by the machinations of the tyrants and the priests, and not by his own disobedience. Let this "infamous thing," with its upholders, be crushed, said Voltaire of the *ancien régime*. Then, added Condorcet exultingly, "tyrants and slaves, and priests with their senseless and hypocritical instruments," will disappear, and there will be only "free men recognizing no other master than reason." [6]

To appreciate the compelling influence of these ideas, we must realize that Rousseau and his Jacobin disciples were not saying that "except for the clergy and the nobility" all the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century were rational and good men. That may have been what the most simple-minded got from the Jacobin orations. But the doctrine could never have become, as in fact it has, the political religion of the democracies had it stood for anything so obviously contrary to common sense and ordinary experience.

Rousseau's dogma of the natural goodness of man did not move him to much love or admiration of his fellowmen. In his *Inequalities Among Mankind*, he described the inside of a civilized man in terms which John Adams, for all his tough-mindedness, found "too black and horrible to be transcribed." [7]

To Rousseau, as to John Calvin who lived in Geneva before him, men were fallen and depraved, deformed with their lusts and their aggressions. The force of the new doctrine lay in its being a gospel of redemption and regeneration. Men who were evil were to be made good. Jacobinism is, in fact, a Christian heresy—perhaps the most influential since the Arian.

In that it preached the need of redemption, its reception was prepared by the Christian education of the people of Western Europe and of North America. Like Saint Paul, the Jacobins promised a new creature who would

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[7] John Adams, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (17[illegible]7), from the *Life and Works of John Adams* (edited with *The Life* by Charles Francis Adams, 1851), Vol. IV., p. 409.

"be led of the spirit" and would not be "under the law." But in the Jacobin gospel, this transformation was to be achieved by the revolutionary act of emancipation from authority. The religious end was to be reached, but without undergoing the religious experience. There was to be no dark night of the soul for each person in the labor of his own regeneration. Instead there were to be riots and strikes and votes and seizure of political power. Instead of the inner struggle of the individual soul, there was to be one great public massive, collective redemption.

3. *Democratic Education*

WE LIVE long enough after the new gospel was proclaimed to have seen what came of it. The post-revolutionary man, enfranchised and emancipated, has not turned out to be the New Man. He is the old Adam. Yet the future of democratic society has been staked on the promises and the predictions of the Jacobin gospel.

For the Jacobin doctrine has pervaded the theory of mass education in the newly enfranchised mass democracies. In America and in most of the newer liberal democracies of the Western world, the Jacobin heresy is, though not unchallenged and not universal, the popular and dominant theory in the schools.

Its popularity is easily accounted for. It promises to solve the problem which is otherwise so nearly insoluble—how to educate rapidly and sufficiently the ever-expanding masses who are losing contact with the traditions of Western society. The explosive increase of the population in the past hundred and fifty years, its recent enfranchisement during the past fifty years, the dissolution, or at least the radical weakening, of the bonds of the family, the churches, and of the local community have combined to make the demand upon the schools almost impossibly big.

Not only do the schools have to teach the arts and sciences to a multiplying mass of pupils. They have also to act in the place of the family, the household economy, the church, and the settled community, and to be the bearers of the traditions and the disciplines of a civilized life. What the school system could do has never been anywhere nearly equal to the demands upon it. The modern democracies have never been willing to pay the price of recruiting and training enough teachers, of supporting enough schools and colleges, of offering enough scholarships to give all children equal opportunities.

The Jacobin doctrine does not solve this problem of mass education—as it does not solve or even throw light upon the problem of how to construct and govern the utopian society which is to exist when the revolution has taken place. What it does is to provide an escape from these unsolved problems. It affirms that in politics the state will wither away and then there will be no problems of how to govern it. For the democratic schools it affirms that there is no problem of supplying the demand: for almost nothing has to be taught in school and almost no effort is needed to learn it.

"The fundamental principle of all morality," said Rousseau in his reply to Archbishop de Beaumont's condemnation of his book, *Emile,* "is that man is a being naturally good, loving justice and order: that there is not any original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right."[8]

And so, when Rousseau's disciple, Pestalozzi, the celebrated educator, said that "in the newborn child are hidden those faculties which are to unfold during life,"[9] he meant that the hidden faculties which would unfold were all of them good ones. Only good faculties, it transpired, were inherited. The evil faculties, on the contrary, were acquired. So Froebel, who was Pestalozzi's disciple, felt able to say that "the still young being, even though as yet unconsciously like a product of nature, precisely and surely wills that which is best for himself."[10]

Froebel, of course, had no way of proving that infants are precise and sure about anything. Nor did Rousseau know how to prove that there is no perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right. But if only all this could be taken as true, how miraculously it simplified the problems of the new democracies! If men do not have to acquire painfully by learning, if they are born with the necessary good faculties, if their first intentions are always right, if they unconsciously but precisely and surely will what is best for themselves from infancy on, then there is in the very nature of things a guarantee that popular government must succeed.

The best government will be the one which governs the least and requires, therefore, the least training and experience in the art of governing. The best education for democracy will be the one which trains, disciplines, and teaches the least. For the necessary faculties are inborn and they are more likely to be perverted by too much culture than to wither for the lack of it. There is, moreover, no body of public knowledge and no public philosophy that the schools are called upon to transmit. There are, therefore, no inconvenient questions of faith and morals, questions on which there is no prospect of agreement by popular decision. The curriculum can be emptied of all the studies and the disciplines which relate to faith and to morals. And so while education can do something to enable the individual to make a success of his own career, the instinctive rightness and righteousness of the people can be relied upon for everything else.

This is a convenient and agreeably plausible escape from reality. Pestalozzi described it by saying that . . .

> Sound Education stands before me symbolized by a tree planted near fertilizing water. A little seed, which contains the design of the tree, its forms and proportion, is placed in the soil. See how it germinates and expands into trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit! The whole tree is an uninterrupted chain of organic parts, the plan of which existed in its seed and root. Man is similar to the tree. In the newborn child are hidden those faculties which are to unfold during life.[11]

The metaphor reveals very neatly how the Jacobin theory inhibits education. In no way that is relevant to the problems of politics and education is a man similar, as Pestalozzi says he is, to a tree which is planted near fertilizing water. For the tree will never, no matter how fertilizing the water near which it is planted, grow up and take to writing treatises, as Pestalozzi did, on the education of trees and how to raise the best trees from all the little saplings. The tree will never worry about whether its little saplings are going to be planted near the most fertilizing of the waters. The educator of a tree is, in short, not another tree. The educator of a tree, the man who plants it near the fertilizing water, is a being so radically different from a tree that the tree is incapable of being aware of his existence. If, however, the tree were enough like a man to notice such things, the teacher of the trees who cultivates them would be worshiped as the god of trees.

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[8] J. J. Rousseau, "Lettre à C. de Beaumont," in *Oeuvres Complètes de J. J. Rousseau,* edited by P. R. Auguis (Paris, Dalibon, 1824-1825), Vol. 7, p. 44. Translation from Geoffrey O'Connell, *Naturalism in American Education* (1938), p. 23.

[9] J. H. Pestalozzi, address on his birthday in 1818, cited in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol. V, p. 166.

[10] F. W. A. Froebel, *Education of Man,* Sec. 8.

[11] *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol. V, p. 166.

Pestalozzi's trees are, in fact, a caricature, but a telling one, of the educational vacuum created by the Jacobin theory. The tradition of the trees is transmitted in their seed, and the older trees are unable to teach and the saplings are unable to learn. Each tree exists for itself, drawing what it can from the fertilizing waters if they happen to be there. Now if human education is founded upon this notion, it must fail to transmit the moral system, indeed the psychic structure, of a civilized society. Relying upon the inherent rightness of the natural impulses of man's first nature, the Jacobin theory does away with the second civilized nature, with the ruler of the impulses, who is identified with the grand necessities of the commonwealth. It overthrows the ruler within each man,—he who exercises "the royal and politic rule" over his "irascible and concupiscible powers."

When reason no longer represents society within the human psyche, then it becomes the instrument of appetite, desire and passion. As William Godwin said in 1798: "Reason is wholly confined to adjusting the comparison between the different objects of desire and investigating the most successful mode of attaining those objects." [12] More than a hundred years later (1911) Prof. William MacDougal put it this way: "The instinctive impulses determine the *end* of all activities, and . . . all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind *is but* . . . the instrument by which those impulses seek their satisfactions. . . ." [13] Or, as Bernard Shaw has it, "Ability to reason accuracy is as desirable as ever, since it is only by accurate reasoning that we can calculate our actions so as to do what we intend to do—that is, to fulfill our will." [14]

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[12] From a memorandum setting forth his intended work. Reproduced in C. K. Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries.* (Boston, 1876), Vol. I, p. 294.

[13] William MacDougal, *Social Psychology* (London, Methuen & Co., 1950), p. 38.

[14] G. B. Shaw, *Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), p. 15.

If it is the role of reason merely to be an instrument of each man's career, then the mission of the schools is to turn out efficient careerists. They must teach the know-how of success, and this—seasoned with the social amenities and some civic and patriotic exhortation—is the subject matter of education. The student elects those subjects which will presumably equip him for success in his career. The rest are superfluous. There is no such thing as a general order of knowledge and a public philosophy, which he needs to possess.

4. *From Jacobinism to Leninism*

TOWARDS the middle of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels produced an explanation of why the first revolution had not fulfilled the promises of the Jacobins. It was that "Modern bourgeois society, rising out of the ruins of feudal society, did not make an end of class antagonisms. It merely set up new classes in place of the old."

As Marx and Engels were scholars and men of the world, they should not have been surprised to find that "the history of all human society past and present has been the history of class struggles," and, had they not become possessed by the Jacobin dogma, they would have thought it most probable that there would be class struggles in the future. But in the Jacobin philosophy the world as it is must be transformed; the day is soon to come when history, reaching its culmination, will end, and there will be no more struggles. So Marx and Engels decided that one more, though this time the conclusive and the final, revolution was called for, in order to achieve the classless society: "The proletariat . . . is compelled to organize itself as a class," and "by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production. . . . Then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."

The revolution which is behind us has failed. But the revolution which is still to come will put "in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms

. . . an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[15]

By the beginning of the twentieth century it was becoming more and more apparent that Marxism was going to undergo the same disappointment as had the Jacobin movement. Since Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto a very considerable progress had been made in carrying out its specific planks. What that document had asked in 1848, "the most advanced nations" had gone a long way toward doing. They were taxing inheritances, they had virtually nationalized central banking, transportation and communications, they were extending the industries owned by the state, they were abolishing child labor and providing free education in public schools.[16]

Yet these reforms were not leading to the classless society. Instead of one class or no class it was more probable that modern societies were heading towards a diversity of classes. Nor, as Engels had promised in his "Anti-Dühring," did it look as if "the state . . . withers away." As a matter of fact the progressive reforms were requiring a rapid enlargement of the powers of the state and an expansion of the bureaucracy. The Marxian predictions were not being fulfilled. The rich were not becoming richer while the poor became poorer. The middle class was not disappearing. It was growing larger. Society was not splitting into the two great hostile camps of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. If it was splitting, it was into factions and into pressure groups.

Owing to the wide disparity between the dogma and the existential reality of things, a crisis developed within the revolutionary socialist movement. This crisis was resolved by Lenin. He could not do again what Marx had done a half century earlier. He could not once more identify the next class, and this time the positively last class, that had to be overthrown. He could not point to the last barricade that had to be stormed. It was then that Lenin resolved the crisis within the revolutionary movement by committing it to the totalitarian solution. Abandoning the naïve but attractive promise that utopia would follow simply and automatically from the revolutionary

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[15] These quotations are from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848).

[16] Cf. the concrete proposals contained in the *Communist Manifesto*.

act, he replaced it with the terrible doctrine that utopia must be brought about by an indefinitely prolonged process of unlimited revolution which would exterminate all opposition, actual and potential.

The totalitarian tendency has always been present and logically implied in the modern revolutionary movement.[17] Yet Mr. Isaiah Berlin is no doubt right in saying that while Lenin's solution of the crisis within the revolutionary movement "marked the culmination of a process," this was "an event . . . which altered the history of our world."[18]

In 1903, at the conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party, which began in Brussels and ended in London, Lenin was asked by a delegate named Posadovsky "whether the emphasis laid by the 'hard' Socialists . . . upon the need for the exercise of absolute authority by the revolutionary nucleus of the Party might not prove incompatible with those fundamental liberties to whose realization Socialism, no less than liberalism, was officially dedicated." Posadovsky asked whether the basic, minimum civil liberties—"the sacrosanctity of the person"—could be infringed and even violated if the party leader so decided.

The answer was given by Plekhanov, one of the founders of Russian Marxism, and, says Mr. Berlin, "its most venerated figure, a cultivated, fastidious and morally sensitive scholar of wide outlook," who had for twenty years lived in Western Europe and was much respected by the leaders of Western Socialism. Plekhanov was the very symbol of civilized "scientific" thinking among Russian revolutionaries. "Plekhanov, speaking solemnly, and with a splendid disregard for grammar, pronounced the words, *salus revolutiae suprema lex*. Certainly, if the revolution demanded it, everything—democracy, liberty, the rights of the individual—must be sacrificed to it. If the democratic assembly elected by the Russian people after the revolution proved amenable to Marxist tactics, it would be kept in being as a Long Parliament; if not, it would be disbanded as quickly as possible. A Marxist revolution could not be carried through by men obsessed by scrupulous regard for the principles of bourgeois liberals. Doubtless whatever was valuable in these principles, like everything else good and desirable, would ultimately be realized by the victorious working class; but during the revolutionary period preoccupation with such ideals was evidence of a lack of seriousness."

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[17] Cf. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, particularly Ch. IV, et seq.; also J. L. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*.

[18] Isaiah Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century" (*Foreign Affairs*, April 1950, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, pp. 364-366).

Mr. Berlin goes on to say that "Plekhanov, who was brought up in a humane and liberal tradition, did, of course, later retreat from this position himself. The mixture of utopian faith and brutal disregard for civilized morality proved too repulsive to a man who had spent the greater part of his civilized and productive life among Western workers and their leaders. Like the vast majority of Social Democrats, like Marx and Engels themselves, he was too European to try to realize a policy which, in the words of Shigalev in Dostoevski's *The Possessed*, 'starting from unlimited liberty ends in unlimited despotism.' But Lenin accepted the premises, and being logically driven to conclusions repulsive to most of his colleagues, accepted them easily and without apparent qualms. His assumptions were, perhaps, in some sense, still those of the optimistic rationalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the coercion, violence, execution, the total suppression of individual differences, the rule of a small, virtually self-appointed minority, were necessary only in the interim period, only so long as there was a powerful enemy to be destroyed."

But how was it that Lenin, and so many after him, have accepted easily and without apparent qualms the repulsive process of violence, executions, suppressions, deception, under the unlimited rule of self-appointed oligarchs? Why do the full-fledged totalitarians, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, not shrink from the means they adopt to achieve their end? The answer is that the inhuman means are justified by the superhuman end: they are the agents of history or of nature. They are the men appointed to fulfill the destiny of creation. They have been known as atheists. But in fact God was their enemy, not because they did not believe in the Deity, but because they themselves were assuming His functions and claiming His prerogatives.

5. *The Overpassing of the Bound*

THIS IS the root of the matter, and it is here that the ultimate issue lies. Can men, acting like gods, be appointed to establish heaven on earth? If we believe that they can be, then the rest follows. To fulfill their mission they must assume a godlike omnipotence. They must be jealous gods, monopolizing power, destroying all rivals, compelling exclusive loyalty. The family, the churches, the schools, the corporations, the labor unions and co-operative societies, the voluntary associations and all the arts and sciences, must be their servants. Dissent and deviation are treason and quietism is sacrilege.

But the monopoly of all power will not be enough. There remains the old Adam. Unless they can remake the fallen nature of a man, the self-elected gods cannot make a heaven of the earth. In the Jacobin gospel of the eighteenth century, and even in the Marxist gospel of the nineteenth century, the new man would be there when the artificial garments were removed—when once he was emancipated by the revolutionary act from the deformation imposed upon him by the clergy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. A hundred years later the new man was nowhere in sight. So the early and softer gospel gave way to a later and infinitely harder one. The new man and the new heaven on earth demanded the remaking of pre-Leninist and pre-Hitlerian man. The decrees of history as revealed to Marx, and the decrees of nature as revealed to Hitler, had to be carried out.

But in order to do that, the human species had first to be transformed—or failing that, exterminated. Destiny called upon the mortal god to make surviving mankind "an active unfailing carrier," as Hannah Arendt says, "of a law to which human beings would otherwise only passively and reluctantly be subject." [19]

In the eyes of its devotees, this is not an inhuman and satanic doctrine. It is above and beyond humanity. It is for the superman that its gospel announces. The ruthlessness, the arbitrariness, the cruelty are not monstrous wickedness. They are natural and necessary, predestined like the fall of a sparrow, in the sublime construction of the earthly paradise.

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[19] Hannah Arendt, *Ideology and Terror; A Novel Form of Government*. From the *Review of Politics* (published at the University of Notre Dame, July, 1953), Vol. XV, No. 3.

The issue is carried outside the realm of rational discourse. As Richard Hooker said of the Puritan revolutionaries three centuries ago, when men believe they are acting "under the absolute command of Almighty God," their discipline "must be received . . . although the world by receiving it should be clean turned upside down." [20] There is no arguing with the pretenders to a divine knowledge and to a divine mission. They are possessed with the sin of pride, they have yielded to the perennial temptation. This is the sovereign evil against which the traditions of civility are arrayed.

Here is "the mortal sin original," the forbidden fruit, which Satan tempts Eve to eat:

> Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods Thyself
> a Goddess.[21]

This tasting of the tree, as Adam says to Dante, was "the overpassing of the bound." [22]

Zeus, says Aeschylus

> . . . is a chastener of froward wills
> And he correcteth with a heavy hand.
> Wherefore be ye instructors of your Lord,
> And with well-reasoned admonitions teach Him
> To have a humbler heart and cast away
> The sin of pride, for it offendeth God.[23]

The delusion of men that they are gods—the pretension that they have a commission to act as if they were gods—is, says Aeschylus, "the blind arrogance of childish thought." It can become "the very madness of a mind diseased." Yet it is not a new and recent infection, but rather the disposition of our first natures, of our natural

and uncivilized selves. Men have been barbarians much longer than they have been civilized. They are only precariously civilized, and within us there is the propensity, persistent as the force of gravity, to revert under stress and strain, under neglect or temptation, to our first natures.

Rousseau and the Jacobins, Marx and the nineteenth-century socialists, did not introduce new impulses and passions into men. They exploited and aggravated impulses and passions that are always there. In the traditions of civility, man's second and more rational nature must master his first and more elemental.

The Jacobins and their successors made a political religion founded upon the reversal of civility. Instead of ruling the elemental impulses, they stimulated and armed them. Instead of treating the pretension to being a god as the mortal sin original, they proclaimed it to be the glory and destiny of man. Upon this gospel they founded a popular religion of the rise of the masses to power. Lenin, Hitler and Stalin, the hard totalitarian Jacobins of the twentieth century, carried this movement and the logical implications of its gospel further and further towards the very bitter end.

And what is that bitter end? It is an everlasting war with the human condition: war with the finitude of man and with the moral ends of finite men, and, therefore, war against freedom, against justice, against the laws and against the order of the good society—as they are conserved in the traditions of civility, as they are articulated in the public philosophy.

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[20] *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity.* In Vol. I, *The Works of Richard Hooker*, edited by J. Keble (second edition, Oxford University, 1841), Preface, Ch. VIII, Sec. 5, p. 182.

[21] *Paradise Lost.* In *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, Bk. V, lines 77-78.

[22] *Divine Comedy*, translated by C. E. Norton (1941), *Paradise*, Canto XXVI, verse 117.

[23] *The Persians*, lines 828-836.