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**Russell**

## In Praise of Idleness

And other essays

With a new preface by Anthony Gottlieb

With an introduction by Howard Woodhouse



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## THE ANCESTRY OF FASCISM

When we compare our age with that of (say) George I, we are conscious of a profound change of intellectual temper, which has been followed by a corresponding change in the tone of politics. In a certain sense, the outlook of two hundred years ago may be called 'rational', and that which is most characteristic of our time may be called 'anti-rational'. But I want to use these words without implying a complete acceptance of the one temper or a complete rejection of the other. Moreover, it is important to remember that political events very frequently take their colour from the speculations of an earlier time: there is usually a considerable interval between the promulgation of a theory and its practical efficacy. English politics in 1860 were dominated by the ideas expressed by Adam Smith in 1776; German politics today are a realisation of theories set forth by Fichte in 1807; Russian politics since 1917 have embodied the doctrines of the Communist Manifesto, which dates from 1848. To understand the present age, therefore, it is necessary to go back to a considerably earlier time.



A widespread political doctrine has, as a rule, two very different kinds of causes. On the one hand, there are intellectual antecedents: men who have advanced theories which have grown, by development or reaction, from previous theories. On the other hand, there are economic and political circumstances which predispose people to accept views that minister to certain moods. These alone do not give a complete explanation when, as too often happens, intellectual antecedents are neglected. In the particular case that concerns us, various sections of the post-war world have had certain grounds of discontent which have made them sympathetic to a certain general philosophy invented at a much earlier date. I propose first to consider this philosophy, and then to touch on the reasons for its present popularity.

The revolt against reason began as a revolt against reasoning. In the first half of the eighteenth century, while Newton ruled men's minds, there was a widespread belief that the road to knowledge consisted in the discovery of simple general laws, from which conclusions could be drawn by deductive ratiocination. Many people forgot that Newton's law of gravitation was based upon a century of careful observation, and imagined that general laws could be discovered by the light of nature. There was natural religion, natural law, natural morality, and so on. These subjects were supposed to consist of demonstrative inferences from self-evident axioms, after the style of Euclid. The political outcome of this point of view was the doctrine of the Rights of Man, as preached during the American and French Revolutions.

But at the very moment when the Temple of Reason seemed to be nearing completion, a mine was laid by which, in the end, the whole edifice was blown sky-high. The man who laid the mine was David Hume. His *Treatise of Human Nature*, published in 1739, has as its sub-title 'An attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects'. This represents the whole of his intention, but only half of his performance. His intention was to substitute observation and induction for

deduction from nominally self-evident axioms. In his temper of mind he was a complete rationalist, though of the Baconian rather than the Aristotelian variety. But his almost unexampled combination of acuteness with intellectual honesty led him to certain devastating conclusions: that induction is a habit without logical justification, and that the belief in causation is little better than a superstition. It followed that science, along with theology, should be relegated to the limbo of delusive hopes and irrational convictions.

In Hume, rationalism and scepticism existed peacefully side by side. Scepticism was for the study only, and was to be forgotten in the business of practical life. Moreover, practical life was to be governed, as far as possible, by those very methods of science which his scepticism impugned. Such a compromise was only possible for a man who was in equal parts a philosopher and a man of the world; there is also a flavour of aristocratic Toryism in the reservation of an esoteric unbelief for the initiated. The world at large refused to accept Hume's doctrines in their entirety. His followers rejected his scepticism, while his German opponents emphasised it as the inevitable outcome of a merely scientific and rational outlook. Thus as the result of his teaching British philosophy became superficial, while German philosophy became anti-rational—in each case from fear of an unbearable agnosticism. European thought has never recovered its previous wholeheartedness; among all the successors of Hume, sanity has meant superficiality, and profundity has meant some degree of madness. In the most recent discussions of the philosophy appropriate to quantum physics, the old debates raised by Hume are still proceeding.

The philosophy which has been distinctive of Germany begins with Kant, and begins as a reaction against Hume. Kant was determined to believe in causality, God, immortality, the moral law, and so on, but perceived that Hume's philosophy made all this difficult. He therefore invented a distinction



between 'pure' reason and 'practical' reason. 'Pure' reason was concerned with what could be proved, which was not much; 'practical' reason was concerned with what was necessary for virtue, which was a great deal. It is of course obvious that 'pure' reason was simply reason, while 'practical' reason was prejudice. Thus Kant brought back into philosophy the appeal to something recognised as outside the sphere of theoretical rationality, which had been banished from the schools ever since the rise of scholasticism.

More important even than Kant, from our point of view, was his immediate successor Fichte, who, passing over from philosophy to politics, inaugurated the movement which has developed into National Socialism. But before speaking of him there is more to be said about the conception of 'reason'.

In view of the failure to find an answer to Hume, 'reason' can no longer be regarded as something absolute, any departure from which is to be condemned on theoretical grounds. Nevertheless, there is obviously a difference, and an important one, between the frame of mind of (say) the philosophical radicals and such people as the early Mohammedan fanatics. If we call the former temper of mind reasonable and the latter unreasonable, it is clear that there has been a growth of unreason in recent times.

I think that what we mean in practice by reason can be defined by three characteristics. In the first place, it relies upon persuasion rather than force; in the second place, it seeks to persuade by means of arguments which the man who uses them believes to be completely valid; and in the third place, in forming opinions, it uses observation and induction as much as possible and intuition as little as possible. The first of these rules out the Inquisition; the second rules out such methods as those of British war propaganda, which Hitler praises on the ground that propaganda 'must sink its mental elevation deeper in proportion to the numbers of the mass whom it has to grip'; the third

forbids the use of such a major premise as that of President Andrew Jackson apropos of the Mississippi, 'the God of the Universe intended this great valley to belong to one nation,' which was self-evident to him and his hearers, but not easily demonstrated to one who questioned it.

Reliance upon reason, as thus defined, assumes a certain community of interest and outlook between oneself and one's audience. It is true that Mrs Bond tried it on her ducks, when she cried, 'come and be killed, for you must be stuffed and my customers filled'; but in general the appeal to reason is thought ineffective with those whom we mean to devour. Those who believe in eating meat do not attempt to find arguments which would seem valid to a sheep, and Nietzsche does not attempt to persuade the mass of the population, whom he calls 'the bungled and botched'. Nor does Marx try to enlist the support of capitalists. As these instances show, the appeal to reason is easier when power is unquestioningly confined to an oligarchy. In eighteenth-century England, only the opinions of aristocrats and their friends were important, and these could always be presented in a rational form to other aristocrats. As the political constituency grows larger and more heterogeneous, the appeal to reason becomes more difficult, since there are fewer universally conceded assumptions from which agreement can start. When such assumptions cannot be found, men are driven to rely upon their own intuitions; and since the intuitions of different groups differ, reliance upon them leads to strife and power politics.

Revolts against reason, in this sense, are a recurrent phenomenon in history. Early Buddhism was reasonable; its later forms, and the Hinduism which replaced it in India, were not. In ancient Greece, the Orphics were in revolt against Homeric rationality. From Socrates to Marcus Aurelius, the prominent men in the ancient world were, in the main, rational; after Marcus Aurelius, even the conservative Neo-Platonists were filled with



superstition. Except in the Mohammedan world, the claims of reason remained in abeyance until the eleventh century; after that, through scholasticism, the renaissance, and science, they became increasingly dominant. A reaction set in with Rousseau and Wesley, but was held in check by the triumphs of science and machinery in the nineteenth century. The belief in reason reached its maximum in the 'sixties; since then, it has gradually diminished, and is still diminishing. Rationalism and anti-rationalism have existed side by side since the beginning of Greek civilisation, and each, when it has seemed likely to become completely dominant, has always led, by reaction, to a new outburst of its opposite.

The modern revolt against reason differs in an important respect from most of its predecessors. From the Orphics onwards, the usual aim in the past was salvation—a complex concept involving both goodness and happiness, and achieved, as a rule, by some difficult renunciation. The irrationalists of our time aim, not at salvation, but at power. They thus develop an ethic which is opposed to that of Christianity and of Buddhism; and through their lust of dominion they are of necessity involved in politics. Their genealogy among writers is Fichte, Carlyle, Mazzini, Nietzsche—with supporters such as Treitschke, Rudyard Kipling, Houston Chamberlain, and Bergson. As opposed to this movement, Benthamites and Socialists may be viewed as two wings of one party: both are cosmopolitan, both are democratic, both appeal to economic self-interest. Their differences *inter se* are as to means, not ends, whereas the new movement, which culminates (as yet) in Hitler, differs from both as to ends, and differs even from the whole tradition of Christian civilisation.

The end which statesmen should pursue, as conceived by almost all the irrationalists out of whom Fascism has grown, is most clearly stated by Nietzsche. In conscious opposition to Christianity as well as to the utilitarians, he rejects Bentham's

doctrine as regards both happiness and the greatest number'. 'Mankind', he says, 'is much more of means than an end . . . mankind is merely the experimental material.' The end he proposes is the greatness of exceptional individuals: 'The object is to attain that enormous energy of greatness which can model the man of the future by means of discipline and also by means of the annihilation of millions of the bungled and botched, and which can yet avoid going to ruin at the sight of the suffering created thereby, the like of which has never been seen before.' This conception of the end, it should be observed, cannot be regarded as in itself contrary to reason, since questions of ends are not amenable to rational argument. We may dislike it—I do myself—but we cannot disprove it any more than Nietzsche can prove it. There is, none the less, a natural connection with irrationality, since reason demands impartiality, whereas the cult of the great man always has as its minor premise the assertion: 'I am a great man.'

The founders of the school of thought out of which Fascism has grown all have certain common characteristics. They seek the good in will rather than in feeling or cognition; they value power more than happiness; they prefer force to argument, war to peace, aristocracy to democracy, propaganda to scientific impartiality. They advocate a Spartan form of austerity, as opposed to the Christian form; that is to say, they view austerity as a means of obtaining mastery over others, not as a self-discipline which helps to produce virtue, and happiness only in the next world. The later ones among them are imbued with popular Darwinism, and regard the struggle for existence as the source of a higher species; but it is to be rather a struggle between races than one between individuals, such as the apostles of free competition advocated. Pleasure and knowledge, conceived as ends, appear to them unduly passive. For pleasure they substitute glory, and, for knowledge, the pragmatic assertion that what they desire is true. In Fichte, Carlyle, and Mazzini, these doctrines are still enveloped in a mantle of conventional



moralistic cant; in Nietzsche they first step forth naked and unashamed.

Fichte has received less than his due share of credit for inaugurating this great movement. He began as an abstract metaphysician, but showed even then a certain arbitrary and self-centred disposition. His whole philosophy develops out of the proposition 'I am I', as to which he says:

'The Ego posits itself and it is in consequence of this bare positing by itself; it is both the agent and the result of the action, the active and that which is produced by the activity; I am expresses a deed (Thathandlung). The Ego is, because it has posited itself.'

The Ego, according to this theory, exists because it wills to exist. Presently it appears that the non-Ego also exists because the Ego so wills it; but a non-Ego so generated never becomes really external to the Ego which chooses to posit it. Louis XIV said, 'l'état, c'est moi'; Fichte said, 'The universe is myself.' As Heine remarked in comparing Kant and Robespierre, 'in comparison with us Germans, you French are tame and moderate'.

Fichte, it is true, explains, after a while, that when he says 'I' he means 'God'; but the reader is now wholly reassured.

When, as a result of the Battle of Jena, Fichte had to fly from Berlin, he began to think that he had been too vigorously positing the non-Ego in the shape of Napoleon. On his return in 1807, he delivered his famous 'Addresses to the German Nation', in which, for the first time, the complete creed of nationalism was set out. These Addresses begin by explaining that the German is superior to all other moderns, because he alone has a pure language. (The Russians, Turks, and Chinese, not to mention the Eskimos and the Hottentots, also have pure languages, but they were not mentioned in Fichte's history books.) The purity of the German language makes the German alone capable of profundity; he concludes that 'to have character and to be German undoubtedly mean the same'. But if the German character is to be preserved from foreign corrupting

influences, and if the German nation is to be capable of acting as a whole, there must be a new kind of education, which will 'mould the Germans into a corporate body'. The new education, he says, 'must consist essentially in this, that it completely destroys the freedom of the will'. He adds that will 'is the very root of man'.

There is to be no external commerce, beyond what is absolutely unavoidable. There is to be universal military service: everybody is to be compelled to fight, not for material well-being, not for freedom, not in defence of the constitution, but under the impulsion of 'the devouring flame of higher patriotism, which embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal, for which the noble-minded man joyfully sacrifices himself, and the ignoble man, who only exists for the sake of the other, must likewise sacrifice himself.'

This doctrine, that the 'noble' man is the purpose of humanity, and that the 'ignoble' man has no claims on his own account, is of the essence of the modern attack on democracy. Christianity taught that every human being has an immortal soul, and that, in this respect, all men are equal; the 'rights of man' was only a development of Christian doctrine. Utilitarianism, while it conceded no absolute 'rights' to the individual, gave the same weight to one man's happiness as to another's; thus it led to democracy just as much as did the doctrine of natural rights. But Fichte, like a sort of political Calvin, picked out certain men as the elect, and rejected all the rest as of no account.

The difficulty, of course, is to know who are the elect. In a world in which Fichte's doctrine was universally accepted, every man would think that he was 'noble', and would join some party of people sufficiently similar to himself to seem to share some of his nobility. These people might be his nation, as in Fichte's case, or his class, as in that of a proletarian communist, or his family, as with Napoleon. There is no objective criterion of



'nobility' except success in war; therefore war is the necessary outcome of this creed.

Carlyle's outlook on life was, in the main, derived from Fichte, who was the strongest single influence on his opinions. But Carlyle added something which has been characteristic of the school ever since; a kind of Socialism and solicitude for the proletariat which is really dislike of industrialism and of the *nouveau riche*. Carlyle did this so well that he deceived even Engels, whose book on the English working class in 1844 mentions him with the highest praise. In view of this, we can scarcely wonder that many people were taken in by the socialistic façade in National Socialism.

Carlyle, in fact, still has his dupes. His 'hero worship' sounds very exalted; we need, he says, not elected Parliaments, but 'Hero-kings, and a whole world not unheroic'. To understand this, one must study its translation into fact. Carlyle, in *Past and Present*, holds up the twelfth-century Abbot Samson as a model; but whoever does not take that worthy on trust, but reads the *Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelonde*, will find that the Abbot was an unscrupulous ruffian, combining the vices of a tyrannous landlord with those of a pettifogging attorney. Carlyle's other heroes are at least equally objectionable. Cromwell's massacres in Ireland move him to the comment: 'But in Oliver's time, as I say, there was still belief in the Judgments of God; in Oliver's time, there was yet no distracted jargon of "abolishing Capital Punishments", of Jean-Jacques Philanthropy, and universal rose-water in this world still so full of sin. . . . Only in late decadent generations . . . can such indiscriminate mashing-up of Good and Evil into one universal patent-treacle . . . take effect in our earth'. Of most of his other heroes, such as Frederick the Great, Dr Francia, and Governor Eyre, all that need be said is that their one common characteristic was a thirst for blood.

Those who still think that Carlyle was in some sense more or less Liberal should read his chapter on Democracy in *Past and*

*Present*. Most of it is occupied with praise of William the Conqueror, and with a description of the pleasant lives enjoyed by serfs in his day. Then comes a definition of liberty: 'The true liberty of a man, you would say, consisted in his finding out, or being forced to find out the right path, and to walk thereon' (p. 263). He passes on to the statement that democracy 'means despair of finding any Heroes to govern you, and contented putting up with the want of them'. The chapter ends by stating, in eloquent prophetic language, that, when democracy shall have run its full course, the problem that will remain is 'that of finding government by your Real-Superiors'. Is there one word in all this to which Hitler would not subscribe?

Mazzini was a milder man than Carlyle, from whom he disagreed as regards the cult of heroes. Not the individual great man, but the nation, was the object of his adoration; and, while he placed Italy highest, he allowed a role to every European nation except the Irish. He believed, however, like Carlyle, that duty should be placed above happiness, above even collective happiness. He thought that God revealed to each human conscience what was right, and that all that was necessary was that everybody should obey the moral law as felt in his own heart. He never realised that different people may genuinely differ as to what the moral law enjoins, or that what he was really demanding was that others should act according to his revelation. He put morals above democracy, saying: 'The simple vote of a majority does not constitute sovereignty, if it evidently contradicts the supreme moral precepts . . . the will of the people is sacred, when it interprets and applies the moral law; null and impotent, when it dissociates itself from the law, and only represents caprice.' This is also the opinion of Mussolini.

Only one important element has since been added to the doctrines of this school, namely the pseudo-Darwinian belief in 'race'. (Fichte made German superiority a matter of language, not of biological heredity.) Nietzsche, who, unlike his followers,



is not a nationalist or an anti-Semite, applies the doctrine only as between different individuals: he wishes the unfit to be prevented from breeding, and he hopes, by the methods of the dog-fancier, to produce a race of super-men, who shall have all power, and for whose benefit alone the rest of mankind shall exist. But subsequent writers with a similar outlook have tried to prove that all excellence has been connected with their own race. Irish professors write books to prove that Homer was an Irishman; French anthropologists give archaeological evidence that the Celts, not the Teutons, were the source of civilisation in Northern Europe; Houston Chamberlain argues at length that Dante was a German and Christ was not a Jew. Emphasis upon race has been universal among Anglo-Indians, from whom imperialist England caught the infection through the medium of Rudyard Kipling. But the anti-Semitic element has never been prominent in England, although an Englishman, Houston Chamberlain, was mainly responsible for giving it a sham historical basis in Germany, where it had persisted ever since the Middle Ages.

About race, if politics were not involved it would be enough to say that nothing politically important is known. It may be taken as probable that there are genetic mental differences between races; but it is certain that we do not yet know what these differences are. In an adult man, the effects of environment mask those of heredity. Moreover, the racial differences among different Europeans are less definite than those between white, yellow, and black men; there are no well-marked physical characteristics by which members of different modern European nations can be certainly known apart, since all have resulted from a mixture of different stocks. When it comes to mental superiority, every civilised nation can make out a plausible claim, which proves that all the claims are equally invalid. It is possible that the Jews are inferior to the Germans, but it is just as possible that the Germans are inferior to the Jews. The whole

business of introducing pseudo-Darwinian jargon in such a question is utterly unscientific. Whatever we may come to know hereafter, we have not at present any good ground for wishing to encourage one race at the expense of another.

The whole movement, from Fichte onwards, is a method of bolstering up self-esteem and lust for power by means of beliefs which have nothing in their favour except that they are flattering. Fichte needed a doctrine which would make him feel superior to Napoleon; Carlyle and Nietzsche had infirmities for which they sought compensation in the world of imagination; British imperialism of Rudyard Kipling's epoch was due to shame at having lost industrial supremacy; and the Hitlerite madness of our time is a mantle of myth in which the German ego keeps itself warm against the cold blasts of Versailles. No man thinks sanely when his self-esteem has suffered a mortal wound, and those who deliberately humiliate a nation have only themselves to thank if it becomes a nation of lunatics.

This brings me to the reasons which have produced the wide acceptance of the irrational and even anti-rational doctrine that we have been considering. There are at most times all sorts of doctrines being preached by all sorts of prophets, but those which become popular must make some special appeal to the moods produced by the circumstances of the time. Now the characteristic doctrines of modern irrationalists, as we have seen, are: emphasis on will as opposed to thought and feeling; glorification of power; belief in intuitional 'positing' of prepositions as opposed to observational and inductive testing. This state of mind is the natural reaction of those who have the habit of controlling modern mechanisms such as aeroplanes, and also of those who have less power than formerly, but are unable to find any rational ground for the restoration of their former preponderance. Industrialism and the war, while giving the habit of mechanical power, caused a great shift of economic and political



power, and therefore left large groups in the mood for pragmatic self-assertion. Hence the growth of Fascism.

Comparing the world of 1920 with that of 1820, we find that there had been an increase of power on the part of: large industrialists, wage-earners, women, heretics, and Jews. (By 'heretics' I mean those whose religion was not that of the Government of their country.) Correlatively, there had been a loss of power on the part of: monarchs, aristocracies, ecclesiastics, the lower middle classes, and males as opposed to females. The large industrialists, though stronger than at any previous period, felt themselves insecure owing to the threat of Socialism, and more particularly from fear of Moscow. The war interests—generals, admirals, aviators, and armament firms—were in the like case: strong at the moment, but menaced by a pestilential crew of Bolsheviks and pacifists. The sections already defeated—the kings and nobles, the small shopkeepers, the men who from temperament were opponents of religious toleration, and the men who regretted the days of masculine domination over women—seemed to be definitely down and out; economic and cultural developments, it was thought, had left no place for them in the modern world. Naturally they were discontented, and collectively they were numerous. The Nietzschean philosophy was psychologically adapted to their mental needs, and, very cleverly, the industrialists and militarists made use of it to weld the defeated sections into a party which should support a medievalist reaction in everything except industry and war. In regard to industry and war, there was to be everything modern in the way of technique, but not the sharing out of power and the effort after peace that made the Socialists dangerous to the existing magnates.

Thus the irrational elements in the Nazi philosophy are due, politically speaking, to the need of enlisting the support of sections which have no longer any *raison d'être*, while the comparatively sane elements are due to the industrialists and militarists. The former elements are 'irrational' because it is scarcely

possible that the small shopkeepers, for example, should realise their hopes, and fantastic beliefs are their only refuge from despair; *per contra*, the hopes of industrialists and militarists might be realised by means of Fascism, but hardly in any other way. The fact that their hopes can only be achieved through the ruin of civilisation does not make them irrational, but only Satanic. These men form intellectually the best, and morally the worst, element in the movement; the rest, dazzled by the vision of glory, heroism, and self-sacrifice, have become blind to their serious interests, and in a blaze of emotion have allowed themselves to be used for purposes not their own. This is the psychopathology of Nazidom.

I have spoken of the industrialists and militarists who support Fascism as sane, but their sanity is only comparative. Thyssen believes that, by means of the Nazi movement, he can both kill Socialism and immensely increase his market. There seems, however, no more reason to think him right than there was to think that his predecessors were right in 1914. It is necessary for him to stir up German selfconfidence and nationalist feeling to a dangerous degree, and unsuccessful war is the most probable outcome. Even great initial successes would not bring ultimate victory; now, as twenty years ago, the German Government forgets America.

There is one very important element which is on the whole against the Nazis although it might have been expected to support reaction—I mean, organised religion. The philosophy of the movement which culminates in the Nazis is, in a sense, a logical development of Protestantism. The morality of Fichte and Carlyle is Calvinistic, and Mazzini, who was in lifelong opposition to Rome, had a thoroughly Lutheran belief in the infallibility of the individual conscience. Nietzsche believed passionately in the worth of the individual, and considered that the hero should not submit to authority; in this he was developing the Protestant spirit of revolt. It might have been expected that the



Protestant Churches would welcome the Nazi movement, and to a certain extent they did so. But in all these elements which Protestantism shared with Catholicism, it found itself opposed by the new philosophy. Nietzsche is emphatically anti-Christian, and Houston Chamberlain gives an impression that Christianity was a degraded superstition which grew up among the mongrel cosmopolitans of the Levant. The rejection of humility, of love of one's neighbour, and of the rights of the meek, is contrary to Gospel teaching; and anti-Semitism, when it is theoretical as well as practical, is not easily reconciled, with a religion of Jewish origin. For these reasons, Nazidom and Christianity have difficulty in making friends, and it is not impossible that their antagonism may bring about the downfall of the Nazis.

There is another reason why the modern cult of unreason, whether in Germany or elsewhere, is incompatible with any traditional form of Christianity. Inspired by Judaism, Christianity adopted the notion of Truth, with the correlative virtue of Faith. The notion and the virtue survived in 'honest doubt', as all the Christian virtues remained among Victorian free-thinkers. But gradually the influence of scepticism and advertising made it seem hopeless to discover truth, but very profitable to assert falsehood. Intellectual probity was thus destroyed. Hitler, explaining the Nazi programme, says:

'The national State will look upon science as a means for increasing national pride. Not only world history, but also the history of civilisation, must be taught from this point of view. The inventor should appear great, not merely as an inventor, but even more so as a fello-countryman. Admiration of any great deed must be combined with pride because the fortunate doer of it is a member of our own nation. We must extract the greatest from the mass of great names in German history and place them before the youth in so impressive a fashion that they may become the pillars of an unshakable nationalist sentiment.'

The conception of science as a pursuit of truth has so entirely disappeared from Hitler's mind that he does not even argue against it. As we know, the theory of relativity has come to be thought bad because it was invented by a Jew. The Inquisition rejected Galileo's doctrine because it is considered untrue; but Hitler accepts or rejects doctrines on political grounds, without bringing in the notion of truth or falsehood. Poor William James, who invented this point of view, would be horrified at the use which is made of it; but when once the conception of objective truth is abandoned, it is clear that the question 'what shall I believe?' is one to be settled, as I wrote in 1907, by 'the appeal to force and the arbitrament of the big battalions', not by the methods of either theology or science. States whose policy is based upon the revolt against reason must therefore find themselves in conflict, not only with learning, but also with the Churches wherever any genuine Christianity survives.

An important element in the causation of the revolt against reason is that many able and energetic men have no outlet for their love of power, and therefore become subversive. Small States, formerly, gave more men political power, and small businesses gave more men economic power. Consider the huge population that sleeps in suburbs and works in great cities. Coming into London by train, one passes through great regions of small villas, inhabited by families which feel no solidarity with the working class; the man of the family has no part in local affairs, since he is absent all day submitting to the orders of his employers; his only outlet for initiative is the cultivation of his back garden at the weekend. Politically, he is envious of all that is done for the working classes, but, though he feels poor, snobbery prevents him from adopting the methods of Socialism and trade unionism. His suburb may be as populous as many a famous city of antiquity, but its collective life is languid and he has no time to be interested in it. To such a man, if he has enough spirit for discontent, a Fascist movement may well appear as a deliverance.



The decay of reason in politics is a product of two factors: on the one hand, there are classes and types of individuals to whom the world as it is offers no scope, but who see no hope in Socialism because they are not wage-earners; on the other hand, there are able and powerful men whose interests are opposed to those of the community at large, and who, therefore, can best retain their influence by promoting various kinds of hysteria. Anti-Communism, fear of foreign armaments, and hatred of foreign competition, are the most important bogeys. I do not mean that no rational man could feel these sentiments; I mean that they are used in a way to preclude intelligent consideration of practical issues. The two things the world needs most are Socialism and peace, but both are contrary to the interests of the most powerful men of our time. It is not difficult to make the steps leading up to them appear contrary to the interests of large sections of the population, and the easiest way of doing this is to generate mass hysteria. The greater the danger of Socialism and peace the more Governments will debauch the mental life of their subjects; and the greater the economic hardships of the present, the more willing the sufferers will be to be seduced from intellectual sobriety in favour of some delusive will o' the wisp.

The fever of nationalism which has been increasing ever since 1848 is one form of the cult of unreason. The idea of one universal truth has been abandoned: there is English truth, French truth, German truth, Montenegrin truth, and truth for the principality of Monaco. Similarly there is truth for the wage-earner and truth for the capitalist. Between these different 'truths', if rational persuasion is despaired of, the only possible decision is by means of war and rivalry in propagandist insanity. Until the deep conflicts of nations and classes which infect our world have been resolved, it is hardly to be expected that mankind will return to a rational habit of mind. The difficulty is that, so long as unreason prevails, a solution of our troubles can only be

reached by chance; for while reason, being impersonal, makes universal co-operation possible, unreason, since it represents private passions, makes strife inevitable. It is for this reason that rationality, in the sense of an appeal to a universal and impersonal standard of truth, is of supreme importance to the well-being of the human species, not only in ages in which it easily prevails, but also, and even more, in those less fortunate times in which it is despised and rejected as the vain dream of men who lack the virility to kill where they cannot agree.



# 6

## SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS, OR COMMUNISM AND FASCISM

It is said by many in the present day that Communism and Fascism are the only practical alternatives in politics, and that whoever does not support the one in effect supports the other. I find myself in opposition to both, and I can no more accept either alternative than, if I had lived in the sixteenth century, I could have been either a Protestant or a Catholic. I will set forth, as briefly as I can, my objections, first to Communism, then to Fascism, and then to what both have in common.

When I speak of a 'Communist', I mean a person who accepts the doctrines of the Third International. In a sense, the early Christians were Communists, and so were many medieval sects; but this sense is now obsolete. I will set forth my reasons for not being a Communist seriatim.

1. I cannot assent to Marx's philosophy, still less to that of Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. I am not a materialist, though I am even further removed from idealism. I do not believe that there is any dialectical necessity in historical change;

this belief was taken over by Marx from Hegel, without its only logical basis, namely, the primacy of the Idea. Marx believed that the next stage in human development must be in some sense a progress; I see no reason for this belief.

2. I cannot accept Marx's theory of value, nor yet, in his form, the theory of surplus value. The theory that the exchange value of a commodity is proportional to the labour involved in its production, which Marx took over from Ricardo, is shown to be false by Ricardo's theory of rent, and has long been abandoned by all non-Marxian economists. The theory of surplus value rests upon Malthus's theory of population, which Marx elsewhere rejects. Marx's economics do not form a logical coherent whole, but are built up by the alternate acceptance and rejection of older doctrines, as may suit his convenience in making out a case against the capitalists.

3. It is dangerous to regard any one man as infallible; the consequence is necessarily an over-simplification. The tradition of the verbal inspiration of the Bible has made men too ready to look for a Sacred Book. But this worship of authority is contrary to the scientific spirit.

4. Communism is not democratic. What it calls the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is in fact the dictatorship of a small minority, who become an oligarchic governing class. All history shows that government is always conducted in the interests of the governing class, except in so far as it is influenced by fear of losing its power. This is the teaching, not only of history, but of Marx. The governing class in a Communist State has even more power than the capitalist class in a 'democratic' State. So long as it retains the loyalty of the armed forces, it can use its power to obtain for itself advantages quite as harmful as those of capitalists. To suppose that it will always act for the general good is mere foolish idealism, and is contrary to Marxian political psychology.

5. Communism restricts liberty, particularly intellectual liberty, more than any other system except Fascism. The complete



unification of both economic and political power produces a terrifying engine of oppression, in which there are no loopholes for exceptions. Under such a system progress would soon become impossible, since it is the nature of bureaucrats to object to all change except increase in their own power. All serious innovation is only rendered possible by some accident enabling unpopular persons to survive. Kepler lived by astrology, Darwin by inherited wealth, Marx by Engels's 'exploitation' of the proletariat of Manchester. Such opportunities of surviving in spite of unpopularity would be impossible under Communism.

6. There is in Marx, and in current Communist thought, an undue glorification of manual as against brain workers. The result has been to antagonise many brain workers who might otherwise have seen the necessity of Socialism, and without whose help the organisation of a Socialist State is scarcely possible. The division of classes is put by Marxians, in practice even more than in theory, too low in the social scale.

7. The preaching of the class-war is likely to cause it to break out at a moment when the opposing forces are more or less evenly balanced, or even when the preponderance is on the side of the capitalists. If the capitalist forces preponderate, the result is an era of reaction. If the forces on both sides are roughly equal, the result, given modern methods of warfare, is likely to be the destruction of civilisation, involving the disappearance of both capitalism and Communism. I think that, where democracy exists, Socialists should rely upon persuasion, and should only use force to repel an illegal use of force by their opponents. By this method it will be possible for Socialists to acquire so great a preponderance that the final war may be brief, and not sufficiently serious to destroy civilisation.

8. There is so much hate in Marx and in Communism that Communists can hardly be expected, when victorious, to establish a régime affording no outlet for malevolence. The arguments in favour of oppression are therefore likely to seem to the

victors stronger than they are, especially if the victory has resulted from a fierce and doubtful war. After such a war the victorious party are not likely to be in the mood for sane reconstruction. Marxists are too apt to forget that war has its own psychology, which is the result of fear, and is independent of the original cause of contention.

The view that the only practically possible choice is between Communism and Fascism seems to me definitely untrue in America, England, and France, and probably also in Italy and Germany. England had a period of Fascism under Cromwell, France under Napoleon, but in neither case was this a bar to subsequent democracy. Politically immature nations are not the best guides as to the political future.

My objections to Fascism are simpler than my objections to Communism, and in a sense more fundamental. The purpose of the Communists is one with which, on the whole, I am in agreement; my disagreement is as to means rather than ends. But in the case of the Fascists I dislike the end as much as the means.

Fascism is a complex movement; its German and Italian forms differ widely, and in other countries, if it spreads, it may assume still other shapes. It has, however, certain essentials, without which it would cease to be Fascism. It is antidemocratic, it is nationalistic, it is capitalistic, and it appeals to those sections of the middle class which suffer through modern developments and expect to suffer still more if Socialism or Communism becomes established. Communism, also, is anti-democratic, but only for a time, at least so far as its theoretical statements can be accepted as giving its real policy; moreover, it aims at serving the interests of wage-earners, who are a majority in advanced countries, and are intended by Communists to become the whole population. Fascism is anti-democratic in a more fundamental sense. It does not accept the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the right principle in statesmanship, but selects



certain individuals, nations, and classes as 'the best', and as alone worthy of consideration. The remainder are to be compelled by force to serve the interests of the elect.

While Fascism is engaged in the struggle to acquire power, it has to make an appeal to a considerable section of the population. Both in Germany and in Italy, it arose out of Socialism, by rejecting whatever was anti-nationalistic in the orthodox programme. It took over from Socialism the idea of economic planning and of an increase in the power of the State, but the planning, instead of being for the benefit of the whole world, was to be in the interests of the upper and middle class in one country. And these interests it seeks to secure, not so much by increased efficiency, as by increased oppression, both of wage-earners and of unpopular sections of the middle class itself. In relation to the classes which lie outside the scope of its benevolence, it may, at best, achieve the kind of success to be found in a well-run prison; more than this it does not even wish to do.

The root objection to Fascism is its selection of a portion of mankind as alone important. The holders of power have, no doubt, made such a selection, in practice, ever since government was first instituted; but Christianity, in theory, has always recognised each human soul as an end in itself, and not a mere means to the glory of others. Modern democracy has derived strength from the moral ideals of Christianity, and has done much to divert Governments from exclusive preoccupation with the interests of the rich and powerful. Fascism is, in this respect, a return to what was worst in ancient paganism.

If Fascism could succeed, it would not do anything to cure the evils of capitalism; on the contrary, it would make them even worse. The manual work would come to be performed by forced labour at subsistence level; the men engaged in it would have no political rights, no freedom as to where they lived or worked, and probably not even a permanent family life; they would, in fact, be slaves. All this may already be seen beginning in the

German method of dealing with unemployment; it is, indeed, an inevitable result of capitalism freed from the control of democracy, and the similar conditions of forced labour in Russia suggest that it is an inevitable result of any dictatorship. In the past, absolutism has always been accompanied by some form of slavery or serfdom.

All this would result if Fascism were to succeed, but it is hardly possible that it should permanently succeed, because it cannot solve the problem of economic nationalism. The most powerful force on the side of the Nazis has been heavy industry, especially steel and chemicals. Heavy industry, organised nationally, is the greatest influence making for war in the present day. If every civilised country had a Government subservient to the interests of heavy industry—as is, to a considerable extent, already the case—war, before long, would be unavoidable. Each fresh victory of Fascism brings war nearer; and war, when it comes, is likely to sweep away Fascism along with most of what will have been in existence at its outbreak.

Fascism is not an ordered set of beliefs, like *laissez-faire* or Socialism or Communism; it is essentially an emotional protest, partly of those members of the middle class (such as small shopkeepers) who suffer from modern economic developments, partly of anarchic industrial magnates whose love of power has grown into megalomania. It is irrational, in the sense that it cannot achieve what its supporters desire; there is no philosophy of Fascism, but only a psycho-analysis. If it could succeed, the result would be widespread misery; but its inability to find a solution for the problem of war makes it impossible that it should succeed for more than a brief moment.

I do not think that England and America are likely to adopt Fascism, because the tradition of representative Government is too strong in both countries to permit such a development. The ordinary citizen has a feeling that public affairs concern him, and would not wish to lose the right of expressing his political



opinions. General Elections and Presidential Elections are sporting events, like the Derby, and life would seem duller without them. Of France it is impossible to feel quite so confident. But I shall be surprised if France adopts Fascism, except perhaps temporarily during a war.

There are some objections—and these, to my mind, the most conclusive—which apply to Communism and Fascism equally. Both are attempts by a minority to mould a population forcibly in accordance with a preconceived pattern. They regard a population as a man regards the materials out of which he intends to construct a machine: the materials undergo much alteration, but in accordance with his purposes, not with any law of development inherent in them. Where living beings are concerned, and most of all in the case of human beings, spontaneous growth tends to produce certain results, and others can only be produced by means of a certain stress and strain. Embryologists may produce beasts with two heads, or with a nose where a toe should be; but such monstrosities do not find life very pleasant. Similarly Fascists and Communists, having in their minds a picture of society as a whole, distort individuals so as to make them fit into a pattern; those who cannot be adequately distorted are killed or placed in concentration camps. I do not think an outlook of this sort, which totally ignores the spontaneous impulses of the individual, is ethically justifiable, or can, in the long run, be politically successful. It is possible to cut shrubs into the shape of peacocks, and by a similar violence a similar distortion can be inflicted upon human beings. But the shrub remains passive, while the man, whatever the dictator may desire, remains active, if not in one sphere then in another. The shrub cannot pass on the lesson in the use of the shears which the gardener has been teaching, but the distorted human being can always find humbler human beings upon whom he can wield smaller shears. The inevitable effects of artificial moulding upon the individual are to produce either cruelty or listlessness,

perhaps both in alternation. And from a population with these characteristics no good thing is to be expected.

The moral effect upon the Dictator is another matter to which both Communists and Fascists give insufficient consideration. If he is, to begin with, a man with little human sympathy, he will, from the first, be unduly ruthless, and will shrink from no cruelty in pursuit of his impersonal ends. If, initially, he suffers sympathetically from the misery which theory obliges him to inflict, he will either have to give way to a successor made of sterner stuff, or will have to stifle his humanitarian feelings, in which case he is likely to become even more sadistic than the man who has undergone no such struggle. In either case, government will be in the hands of ruthless men, in whom love of power will be camouflaged as desire for a certain type of society. By the inevitable logic of despotism, whatever of good may have existed in the original purposes of the dictatorship will gradually fade out of sight, and the preservation of the Dictator's power will emerge more and more as the naked purpose of the State machine.

Preoccupation with machines has produced what may be called the manipulator's fallacy, which consists in treating individuals and societies as if they were inanimate, and manipulators as if they were divine beings. Human beings change under treatment, and the operators themselves change as a result of the effect which the operations have upon them. Social dynamics is therefore a very difficult science, about which less is known than is necessary to warrant a dictatorship. In the typical manipulator, all feeling for natural growth in his patient is atrophied; the result is not, as he hopes, passive adaptation to a place in the preconceived pattern, but morbid and distorted growth, leading to a pattern which is grotesque and macabre. The ultimate psychological argument for democracy and for patience is that an element of free growth, of go as you please and untrained natural living, is essential if men are not to become misshapen



monsters. In any case, believing, as I do, that Communist and Fascist dictatorships are alike undesirable, I deplore the tendency to view them as the only alternatives, and to treat democracy as obsolete. If men think them the only alternatives, they will become so; if men think otherwise, they will not.