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REVOLUTION AND THE FORMATION OF
POLITICAL SOCIETY IN THE SOCIAL CONTRACT*

Hilail Gildin

Great minds are invariably understood by fewer people than they influence. The fate that befell Rousseau's teaching (if fate is the appropriate expression here) furnishes a continuing, though melancholy, confirmation of this truth. More than any other major political philosopher, Rousseau helped win acceptance for the view that democracy is the only legitimate form of government. Since Rousseau was convinced that only a tiny minority of the regimes existing in the world at any one time would ever be democratic, his view implied that the overwhelming majority of political orders are, and will continue to be, illegitimate. However, this conclusion did not have the revolutionary implications for him that it would have for many of our contemporaries because he thought that only a tiny minority of regimes ever can be democratic or legitimate and he saw no point in encouraging revolutions whose only result, after much suffering, would be the replacement of one illegitimate regime by another. In a word, Rousseau did not believe in Progress. He did not think that the world was becoming ever more hospitable to democratic rule. The work which made him famous was an attack on the view that intellectual progress, and the diffusion of its results, tends to be accompanied by moral and social progress. The revolutionary doctrine that is sometimes associated with his name resulted from combining his views regarding the democratic character of all legitimate government with a belief in Progress that is incompatible with his philosophy. That combination was more explosive than either of its ingredients had been. Rousseau's belief that freedom is not the first of all climates—that it is, in fact, the fruit of very few climates—was either abandoned or vanished from sight. It was replaced by the revolutionary conviction that, thanks to the progress of the human race, there was less and less excuse for enduring the evils inflicted on men by their illegitimate rulers merely because one was too squeamish and cowardly to do the ruthless things that would rid men of their rule. The revolutionary tradition based on this conviction has at times become so powerful that Rousseau's non-adherence to its views regarding revolutionary change has seemed to be a strange aberration for which explanations have been given that are no less strange.

Rousseau did not think that a sound political order would come into being through the workings of Progress. It is hard to tell from the Social

* The author thanks the Relm Foundation for providing financial support for part of the research for this paper. A version of this paper was presented at the 1976 Annual Meeting of the APSA.
Contract how it would take place because of a curious vacillation in his remarks on this point. In Book I (Chapter 6), while setting forth the content of the social contract, Rousseau speaks as if no more were needed to form a legitimate social order than for men at the dawn of political society to gather together and agree on reasonable conditions for living together.\(^1\) He even suggests that this is how political orders everywhere arose.\(^2\) In Book II (Chapter 6), however, Rousseau declares that the task of determining those conditions is utterly beyond the capacity of any such gathering of men, and that their incapacity makes the intervention of a supremely wise legislator indispensable.\(^3\)

Before one can understand the conflict between these two accounts, one must restore them to the argument of the book of the Social Contract in which they appear. The argument of Book I opens with the famous words: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." As the next paragraph makes clear, the chains in question are the obligations which political society imposes on previously free and autonomous men when it binds them to one another. No one who lives in a political society is free to act exactly as he pleases, least of all the despot, who thinks of all of his subjects as slaves. Rousseau affirms that he does not know how the transition from freedom to the chains of political life took place, which should be remembered when reading his later remarks about that transition,\(^4\) nor does he promise to show men how to restore their freedom. What he does claim to determine is how the deprivation of freedom required by every political society can be made legitimate: this is the announced theme of this book from its opening chapter.\(^5\)

Rousseau’s discussion of that theme continues in the next chapter. There we are told why a man, once he has attained maturity, is by nature free of any obligation to obey the commands of another, but we are also told under what conditions men may properly alienate this natural freedom of theirs.\(^6\) Self-preservation provides the key to understanding both natural freedom and its alienation. Nature has so made men, we are told, that each one has the greatest possible stake in

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\(^1\) Citations from the Social Contract are by book, chapter, and paragraph. Parenthetical references in the notes following such citations are to the Pléiade edition of Rousseau’s Oeuvres Complètes, sometimes cited here as O.C. The quotations from the Social Contract are based upon the translations by Frederick Watkins (London, 1953), Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth, 1968), and G. D. H. Cole (Everyman).

\(^2\) 5 (III, p. 360).

\(^3\) 10 (p. 350).

\(^4\) For what is hypothetical and what is not in the Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité, see Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago, 1953), p. 367, n. 32. Compare the "hypothetical" discussion of Rousseau's own natural goodness and of the difference between that goodness and the virtue that revelation, as distinguished from the "law of nature, or at least its voice," makes possible, in Dialogues, II (O.C., I, pp. 820ff.).

\(^5\) See Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 255.

\(^6\) 3 (p. 352).
preserving himself. Therefore, each man must be allowed to be the judge of what the best means for self-preservation are; i.e., each must be allowed to be his own master. However, conditions can arise under which one finds living under another's command the best means, and so the concern with self-preservation, which justified natural freedom in the first place, now justifies alienating it. Rousseau gives the example of children who have attained maturity, and are no longer under any obligation to continue living with their father and obeying him but who may find it advantageous to do so, in which case they will "alienate their freedom... for their utility." He expresses no disapproval of this alienation: he assumes that such children find in the love and the "means" of their father recompense for the freedom that they forgo in order to live with him. He even displays a momentary willingness to consider a family of this kind as a paradigm for political society. The parallelism between the two proves to be untenable, however, because the passion animating rulers—the pleasure of commanding—does not carry with it the guarantees of beneficence that the father's love affords his children. In the absence of such guarantees, renouncing one's freedom is not a sensible act, according to Rousseau.

In the explicit argument of the *Social Contract* freedom is treated almost exclusively in terms of self-preservation, however inadequate a basis this may seem to furnish for understanding all that political freedom meant for Rousseau. An appeal to the requirements of self-preservation justifies the assertion that men are by nature free. A similar appeal justifies the replacement of natural freedom by conventional freedom through the enactment of the social contract. Since Rousseau will later claim that it is very much to one's advantage to exchange natural freedom for conventional freedom, one might wonder why the first chapter of the work opens with the contrast between freedom and chains, which presents the loss of natural freedom as a misfortune (of course it would not cease to be one just because the chains were legitimate and the loss irreparable). To understand this, one must remember that for Rousseau natural freedom is not merely a means of self-preservation. It is also a condition for and an ingredient of happiness. A substitute for natural freedom can be found—conventional freedom—which is in many respects superior to what it replaces as a means of self-preservation. But there appears to be no substitute, according to Rousseau, for natural freedom as an ingredient of happiness. It is perfectly possible, therefore, for him both to deplore and to congratulate man on the transition from the state of nature to

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7 II, 5, 2 (p. 376); III, 9, 4 (pp. 419–20; for the difference between "prosperity" and "riches," see O.C., III, pp. 924, 1004–5).
8 II, 4, 10 (p. 375).
9 See his advice to the ichthyophagous people in II, 11, 3 (pp. 392–93). In limiting our discussion to what Rousseau makes central in the *Social Contract*, and hence to self-preservation and freedom, as well as to happiness and freedom, we do not mean to minimize the importance of understanding the relation of
political society, particularly since, according to him, the overwhelming majority of men who have reached the point of human development at which self-preservation and natural freedom are incompatible are no longer capable of the kind of happiness that natural freedom makes possible and cannot even be said to desire that happiness.\(^\text{10}\)

Having tried to show, chiefly by appealing to considerations of self-preservation, why man is by nature free, and having paused to refute the view that naked force can give rise to legitimate government, Rousseau turns to convention or voluntary agreement for an explanation of how ruling and being ruled in political society can have a legitimate origin (I 4). Here he speaks only of agreements which give rise to slavery or to its political counterpart, despotism. This is surely in part the result of his abhorrence of slavery or despotism and his freedom to goodness and to virtue in Rousseau. Nor do we mean to suggest that Rousseau attained full clarity about that relation. In his *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau describes, in different but adjacent paragraphs, two different but adjacent peaks in the human condition, peaks attained during the state of nature and never equaled since (O.C., III, pp. 170–71). The first peak is a peak in goodness. It occurs during the primitive state of nature, prior to the advent of fixed dwellings and of family life, which usher in the following period. In the primitive state of nature, man is said to have been good and compassionate as a consequence of being "placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the baneful enlightenment of civil man." The second peak, a peak in happiness, occurs during the second period. The developments of the second period give rise to *amour-propre*. Men become, for the first time, vengeful and cruel. Yet the war of all against all does not break out as yet. Dependence on other men for self-preservation, a consequence of the division of labor, is necessary to produce that result. Rather than being the scene of the greatest misery, the second period in the state of nature, by "maintaining a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour-propre, must have been the happiest and the most durable." Confronted by a choice between a peak in goodness and a peak in happiness, Rousseau unhesitatingly chooses happiness. This parallels the advice he gives the ichthyophagous people in the *Social Contract*: he counsels them to prefer the condition in which they are certain to be happier, and to remain savage. See also n. 10 below.

10 *Discourse on Inequality*, II, III, pp. 174–5, 193. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 254–55, 278–79, 290, and n. 61. The inclusion of a reference to *Social Contract*, I, 8, 1 (p. 364) in n. 61 was explained by Strauss in an oral communication as follows: the counterfactual character of that paragraph is usually overlooked; if one becomes aware of it, it supports the contention in the text. Rousseau's account of the development of the human race in the *Discourse on Inequality* abstracts from the genesis of religion. He thereby keeps his promise to "set aside all the facts" recorded in the writings of Moses. As a result, the *Discourse on Inequality* does not shed light on his suggestion in the *Social Contract* (IV, 8, 1 [p. 460]) that the first organized societies were theocratic. Furthermore, his argument against the belief in the beneficent moral and political consequences of the intellectual progress of the human race would be all the more powerful if that argument could be made while taking into account only the influence of human reason on human affairs. Finally, he repudiates all developments beyond the second period in the state of nature, a state men left only "through some baneful accident which for the common advantage should never have occurred" (*Discourse on Inequality*, II [III, p. 171]), even though he is aware, as he makes clear in his note to this passage, that Christianity is one of these later developments (see n. XVI, first and last paragraphs [III, pp. 220–21]). Rousseau could not have expressed his preferences as boldly as he did had he dealt explicitly with the religion of the savages.
desire to demolish the agreements used to defend them. But he then goes on to declare that every agreement to alienate one’s freedom must be invalid.

Up to this point, Rousseau has more than once voiced the assumption that a requirement of political society is the replacement of freedom by bonds or the alienation of freedom. He claims, moreover, to have shown that there is no possible origin for these bonds other than convention or agreement. Now, however, he declares that all such agreements to alienate one’s freedom are null and void:

To renounce one’s freedom is to renounce one’s quality as a man, the rights, and even the duties, of humanity. There can be no possible compensation for anyone who renounces everything. Such a renunciation is incompatible with the nature of man, and to deprive one’s will of all freedom is to deprive one’s actions of all morality. Finally a convention which stipulates absolute authority on the one hand and unlimited obedience on the other, is vain and contradictory. Is it not clear that one is under no obligation whatever to a person from whom one has the right to demand everything and does not this condition alone, without equivalence or exchange, entail the nullity of the act? For what right can my slave have against me, when everything he has belongs to me, and his right being mine, this right I have against myself is a meaningless phrase?11

Let us limit ourselves to the last part of the argument in this passage. According to Rousseau, the very notion of a contract implies that, to take the simplest case, each party incurs an obligation to benefit the other in some way, and each party acquires a right to the benefit the other has agreed to confer. In other words, a contract is possible only between individuals each of whom is capable of having rights over the other and obligations to the other. Now a master, by definition, cannot have any obligations to his slave, nor can the slave, by definition, have any rights over his master. Therefore the very notion of a master-slave relationship contradicts the notion of a contract.

Would matters be at all improved if one substituted a somewhat less strict master-slave relationship for this one? Rousseau explores the possibility in the summary of the Social Contract which appears in Book V of Émile and rejects it less in itself than as a model for the kind of agreement through which a sovereign is created. To understand why, it is also important to see why he devotes so much time to discussing slavery agreements. He has already conceded that political society requires the alienation of freedom and his argument claims to show that voluntary agreement is the only legitimate way in which such alienation can take place. Now the most obvious example of an agreement through which one alienates one’s freedom is an agreement by which one becomes a slave. Rousseau’s objections to such agreements have just been noted, but his objection to mitigated slavery is slightly different: “If there is any reservation, any restriction in the deed of

11 I, 4, 6 (p. 356).
slavery, we shall then discuss whether this deed does not become a true contract, in which each of the two contracting parties, having in this respect no common superior, remains its own judge regarding the conditions of the contract, and is therefore to that extent free and competent to break it [maîtres de le rompre] as soon as it regards itself as wronged?"12

To the words "common superior" Rousseau appends the following note: "If they [the contracting parties] had one, this common superior would be none other than the sovereign, and then the right of slavery, founded on the right of sovereignty, would not be its source." Sovereignty, not slavery, is thus the true theme of Rousseau's discussion of slavery here.

An agreement giving rise to mitigated slavery, unlike the ones just discussed, can be legitimate. However, such an agreement, taken by itself, is obviously too unreliable to be the basis for sovereignty. At the beginning of the Social Contract, Rousseau states that he wishes to find a rule for the management of public affairs that would be both "legitimate and reliable."13 Satisfying both requirements did not, at that time, appear to present any notable difficulties. In the present context, however, any agreement to alienate one's freedom which is reliable proves illegitimate, while any agreement to do so which is legitimate proves unreliable. The reader who has followed the thread of Rousseau's reflections on the surrender of natural freedom is now faced with an impasse which calls into question the possibility of ever establishing a legitimate political order.

Rousseau sums up his reasons for denying that a contract to alienate one's freedom can be valid, as follows:

Thus, whichever way one regards things, the right of slavery is null and void, not only because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless. These words, slavery and right, are contradictory; they mutually exclude each other. Whether addressed by a man to a man, or by a man to a people, this speech will always be equally senseless: "I make a convention with you entirely at your expense and entirely to my profit, which I will honor as long as it pleases me, and which you will honor as long as it pleases me."14

It is noteworthy that Rousseau omits one possibility in ridiculing this speech. He does not say that the speech would be nonsensical if it were addressed by a people to a man. This possibility will provide him with an escape from the impasse to which his analysis thus far has led. In the next chapter he argues that the way in which a people acquires authority over its individual members must be examined, and the chapter in which he sets forth his answer to this question is the chapter which contains his exposition of the social contract.

12 Émilie, V (IV, p. 839, par. 4; cf. 840, par. 5, 841, par. 1).
13 I, opening par. (p. 351).
14 I, 4, 14 (p. 358).
When discussing the family earlier in the book as we noted above, Rousseau had indicated that the alienation of freedom was permissible in cases where it was more conductive to self-preservation than the retention of freedom would be. The difficulty was how to find in political life any guarantee like that afforded by a father’s affection for his children. Rousseau returns to this difficulty here, and assumes that human development has reached the point at which natural freedom and self-preservation are no longer compatible. Self-preservation, whose requirements justified man’s natural freedom, now dictates the surrender of that freedom. Yet since the surrender is made with a view to self-preservation, the agreement through which it is made must somehow guarantee self-preservation. The slavery agreements repudiated earlier provided no such guarantee precisely because they involved the surrender of freedom. Now, however, Rousseau will claim that there is one way, but only one, to alienate one’s freedom which will enhance the prospects of one’s self-preservation—the way set out by the social contract.

The heart of the social contract is said to be “the total alienation of each individual with all his rights to the entire community”: it demands the alienation of natural freedom no less than did the agreements Rousseau earlier rejected. In contrast to those agreements, however, in the present case the surrender is made to no individual, and no individual is spared having to make the surrender; i.e., the social contract makes men politically equal, where the slavery agreements sought to authorize the most profound political inequality between men. Under the social contract all men acquire rights over each other and all incur obligations to each other, in conformity with what Rousseau holds to be part of the very notion of a contract; thus although the social contract requires that natural freedom be alienated (if it did not, it would not be reliable), it does not violate the very notion of a contract (if it did, it would not be legitimate). It is the “first” contract that is both legitimate and reliable, and its presence makes it possible for other legitimate and reliable contracts to be enacted.

The preceding remarks are intended less to shed light on the content of the social contract as expounded by Rousseau, which is well known, than to point out why he came to believe that no political authority can be legitimate unless it has the origin and the character prescribed by the social contract. By this standard, very few, if any, governments of his time could justify their claims to the obedience of their subjects, and in an earlier version of the Social Contract Rousseau openly admitted this fact:

15 I, 6, 1 (p. 360).
16 I, 6, 1, 3, 4 (p. 360).
17 I, 6, 6, 8 (pp. 360–61).
18 I, 6, 7 (p. 361); cf. Émile, V (IV, pp. 841, par. 2).
19 I, 2, 2 (p. 352); I, 9, 1 (p. 365).
There are a thousand ways of assembling men, but there is only one way to unite them. That is why I give in this work only one method for the formation of political societies, although in the multitude of aggregations which presently go by that name, perhaps no two were formed in the same manner, and not one in accordance with the manner I establish. But I seek right and reason and am not engaged in a dispute about facts.20

This passage disappears from the definitive version of the Social Contract, however, and in its place we find a passage which, as it were, extends the benefit of the doubt to every existing regime:

The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act, that the slightest modification would make them vain and ineffective; so that, although they perhaps never been formally set forth, they are everywhere the same, everywhere tacitly admitted and recognized; until, on the violation of the social pact, each regains his original right and recovers his natural freedom, while losing the conventional freedom is favor of which he renounced it.21

One might attempt to explain away the conflict between these two passages by observing that, for Rousseau, every government which pretends to be not only a government of the people but also a government for the people tacitly pays homage to the principles of political justice expounded in the Social Contract. While there are other passages in Rousseau which must be understood in this way,22 the one just quoted does not lend itself to such an interpretation. Here he distinguishes between an earlier period during which the social contract was everywhere in force and a later period in which it seems to have been violated, at least in some places. Why does the man who announced that he did not know how political rule and subjection had arisen now ascribe a legitimate origin to political orders everywhere?

The manner in which Rousseau describes the enactment of the social contract is more favorable to the possibility that most existing regimes are legitimate than are the views he expresses later in the work. As we shall see, he goes on to point out just how difficult it is for a legitimate social order to come into being and, as a consequence, how rare such societies are. This is only one of a number of cases in the Social Contract in which Rousseau appears more favorably disposed to the common political practices of men than his strict doctrine would require or, indeed, would permit: for example, one will find him speaking as though all forms of government, including hereditary monarchy, are capable of being legitimate.23 Careful students of the Social Contract have seen, however, that the chapter devoted to monarchy in Rousseau's discussion of various forms of government24 is not intended to show how

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21 I, 6, 5 (p. 360).
22 Émile, V, IV, (p. 858).
23 C.S., II, 6, 6 (p. 379).
24 See Robert Déraître's note to the chapter on monarchy (III, pp. 1479–80, n. 2 to 408) as well as his article on the subject, cited in that note.
hereditary monarchy can be made legitimate but rather why this cannot be done. When one has followed to the end Rousseau's discussion in Book III of the danger that sovereignty will be usurped by government and of the measures that must be taken to protect the sovereign against that danger, one sees clearly that the scope of governmental arrangements which are compatible with his principles is far narrower than one might at first expect. Moreover, there can be no doubt that, according to Rousseau's strict doctrine, if the people are kept from exercising their sovereignty, the social contract is violated and the individual regains his natural freedom. Yet Rousseau fails to clearly apply this principle to the subjects of large monarchical states: on the contrary, speaking of Rome, he dates the usurpation of sovereignty not from Caesar or Augustus, whom he calls "monarchs," but from Tiberius, whom he calls a "despot." Those readers who would prefer to call Caesar or Augustus "tyrants," as Rousseau himself does in his other writings, find themselves confronted with a distinction between tyrants, who usurp governmental authority but govern in accordance with "law," and "lawless" despots. From Rousseau's strict doctrine of law it follows, as he remarks (in an aside), that "if one examined things carefully one would find that very few nations have laws." Nevertheless, he frequently chooses to speak of law in a much looser and more common sense of the term, and as a consequence, the line separating legitimate from illegitimate government is far vaguer than it need be, given his doctrines.

An eminent thinker has noted that the only writing traditionally attributed to Aristotle in which there are oaths in the text is the Politics, and he argues persuasively for the view that this peculiarity of the Politics is altogether appropriate, given the subject matter of the work. It is all the more notable, therefore, that Rousseau's Social Contract should be his least eloquent and impassioned work dealing with moral and political matters. As soon as it appeared, it acquired the reputation of being a most abstract and difficult work. Rousseau fully expected this. He never thought that it would enjoy the popular success of Émile and Julie. Its abstract character, he tells us elsewhere, permitted him to treat political issues boldly. I would suggest that the restraint Rousseau exhibits in the Social Contract is caused by his reluctance to incite men living under illegitimate rulers—that is, most men—to throw off their chains. If the conditions conducive to a just society are, of necessity, rare, as he says, illegitimate regimes are a necessary evil for the overwhelming majority of men—necessary because the incompatibility between natural freedom and self-preservation forces men to form political societies even when the conditions

25 III, 17 (pp. 433–34), especially the final paragraph, and III, 18 (pp. 434–36).
26 III, 10, 3 n., 9–10; cf. O.C., III, pp. 23, 88, 190, 269, 880.
27 III, 15, 8. The passage continues with the words, "However this may be..."
28 Lettres écrites de la montagne, VI, III (p. 812).
favorable to legitimate government are absent. Rousseau clearly wishes the management of public affairs entrusted to men who are law-abiding in his strict sense of the term, but where this is not feasible, where only illegitimate rule is possible, he prefers illegitimate rulers who are "law"-abiding in the usual sense of the term, if not in his own sense, to rulers who are utterly lawless and arbitrary. He thinks that revolutions against "law"-abiding but illegitimate rulers tend, on the whole, to replace such rulers with others who, in addition to being illegitimate, are "law"-less and despotic, a change which he does not regard as an improvement. Rousseau, given his teaching, cannot deny subjects the right to remove their rulers when the terms of the social contract had not been observed, but he obviously did not think that it is always wise for men to exercise this right, and he did not wish to be guilty of inciting men to acts which he regarded as unwise. This accounts for his relative tolerance of certain political practices which he saw no way to avoid. At the same time, he is careful to warn societies fortunate enough to be law-abiding, in the strict sense of the term, against the dangers stemming from those whom they could not avoid employing to carry out their decisions. Accordingly, his analysis of government is as much concerned with how to protect the sovereign against the usurpation of its authority by those who govern as it is with determining what kinds of government are compatible with the sovereignty of the people, to use these words in his sense. He makes his preference for small and free republics clear in the Social Contract but does not wish to encourage men whose societies cannot be of this character to overthrow the societies in which they do live merely because they are not small and free.

In the opening paragraph of the Social Contract, Rousseau announces his desire to see whether a way to regulate the management of public affairs that is both legitimate and reliable can be found. One realizes, in the course of studying Book I, that the words "legitimate" and "reliable" foreshadow the impasse created by the opposition between the requirements of legitimacy and the requirements of reliability in the establishment of political authority, an impasse to which the social contract offers the only solution. The same pattern—an analysis leading to an impasse the only solution to which proves to greatly narrow the range of what he is prepared to regard as politically acceptable—reappears in Books II and III. In Book II, the impasse is created by the conflict between the thesis that a sovereign people is the

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29. Rousseau was accused of contradicting himself in the Discourse on Inequality on the grounds that the denunciation of political life in the body of the Discourse was incompatible with the praise of Geneva contained in its Epistle Dedicatory. Rousseau replied that in the Epistle Dedicatory he had congratulated his fatherland for having one of the best governments that can exist, while in the Discourse he found that there could be very few good governments; he denied that this was an inconsistency requiring an explanation (III, pp. 1385, 235, 186).
only legitimate source of the laws under which it lives and the thesis that no people possesses the ability to discern the most important of these laws until after it has lived under them. By the most important laws Rousseau has in mind, to begin with, what we would today call the constitution of a society. As he presents this conflict, it is an important manifestation of the potential opposition between interest and justice, to the prevention of which he also refers in the opening paragraph of the Social Contract.

Book III shows why the institution of a body distinct from the sovereign to carry out the sovereign’s decisions is unavoidable, and why it would be destructive of sovereignty to attempt to carry out its own decisions. The same book shows why this distinct body sooner or later usurps sovereign authority. To protect the sovereign against this danger for as long as possible, Rousseau requires measures which only a small society can hope to put into practice, a fact which he frankly acknowledges here.

The analytic pattern of the first three books does not, as far as I can see, reappear in Book IV, but something akin to it emerges when one considers the relation of the book as a whole to the conclusion of the preceding book. At the end of Book III, Rousseau proposes periodic assemblies of a certain kind as a remedy to the threat to the sovereign posed by the government. During these assemblies the sovereign would be asked to pronounce on whether the fundamental political arrangements of the society shall continue to remain in effect. This suggestion has the effect of making every constitution (in our sense of the term) or the fundamental laws of every society, as well as every government, provisional. It is not surprising, then, to find that he devotes the next book to suggestions for reinforcing the constitution of the state.

Further, each of the first three books ends with a chapter which sharply exposes the limitations of the chief subject under discussion in that book. The last chapter in Book I discloses an important limitation upon the justice that is brought into being by the enactment of the social contract: a people’s claim to its territory cannot be established by the social contract, and may well be disputed by other peoples with perfect justice, unless conditions are met which one cannot reasonably expect any people to meet. The second book, which is devoted to

30 Apart from all other conditions, a people would have to be not the present, but the first, occupant of the territory it inhabits, and even this could not oblige another people to respect its claim if the self-preservation of that other people were at stake. Elsewhere in the chapter, Rousseau speaks openly of the fact that a people’s possession of its territory results from “usurpation” or “seizure.” The note with which the chapter ends brings out a further limitation of the social contract: the contract will fail to be effective unless the parties to it are politically equal, which Rousseau thought they could not be—and which perhaps they could not be in the kind of small city he had in mind—if there were great inequalities in wealth between them.
law as the central act of the general will, as well as to what the legislator must do to bring into being a society in which law is the act of the general will, ends by describing as “most important of all” a kind of law which never comes up for discussion in the assembly of the people and which is never submitted to the people for its ratification, but “which the great legislator occupies himself with in secret.” Rousseau is speaking of “manners and morals, of customs, and above all, of opinion.” He is referring to the spirit and character of a people and to the seemingly indifferent regulations from which they arise. The most important kind of law is thus not even a law in the Roussean sense of the term.31 The chapter ending the book devoted to government makes clear that, strictly speaking, every government is provisional.32 Although, as noted above, the fourth book does not seem to exhibit this pattern, its last substantive chapter brings out clearly just how much the right of men to manage their own affairs, which is presupposed in Rousseau’s account of political authority, depends, for its successful exercise, upon the convictions of men regarding the divine management of human affairs, or upon religion.33

31 II, 12, 6 (p. 394).
32 III, 18, 7–9 (pp. 435–36).
33 The well-known clash (upon which Rousseau lays stress) between the religion of the Savoyard Vicar and Rousseau’s civil religion has a curious counterpart. The Savoyard Vicar’s declaration of Jesus’ superiority to Socrates parallels Rousseau’s declaration of Cato’s superiority to Socrates (O.C., IV, p. 626; III, p. 255). In both declarations, the humanity of Socrates is contrasted to the divinity of those declared superior to him: “The virtue of Socrates is that of the wisest of men: but between Caesar and Pompey, Cato appears a god among mortals.” In the corresponding passage about Jesus, the Savoyard Vicar says that “if the life and death of Socrates are those of a wise man [d’une sage], the life and death of Jesus are those of a God.” A third individual whose divinity Rousseau affirms is himself qua man, i.e., qua Solitary Walker. His ecstatic sentiment of existence, while it lasts, is said to make him as self-sufficient as God (O.C., I, p. 1047). Are the peaks described in the fifth Revery (the ecstasy is an experience of one’s own existence) and in the seventh Revery (the ecstasy is an experience of unity with nature as a whole) different, or are they complementary descriptions of the same experience? If the latter, then the Solitary Walker’s sentiment of existence has an expansive component lacking in that of the savage. The source of that expansive component is said, at the beginning of Book III of Émile, to be the excess of faculties over needs. If a civilized man could keep his nature intact, at least in essence, if he could benefit from the enlargement of his powers made possible by the intellectual progress of the human race without being enslaved by the by-products of that progress, he would be “a man of nature enlightened by reason.” (O.C., I, pp. 808ff), and his soul would be as expansive as is humanly possible. (Émile, by contrast, is “natural man living in society.”) Cf. Pierre Burgelin, La philosophie de l’existence de J.-J. Rousseau (Paris, 1952), pp. 149–60; Georges Poulet, “Expansion et concentration chez Rousseau,” Les Temps Modernes, February-June 1961, pp. 940ff. For the “force of an expansive soul” as the ultimate root of compassion or pity, see Émile, IV (O.C., IV, p. 523n.). Lack of intelligence, though frequently undeserved and always a misfortune, nevertheless often inspires laughter rather than pity. That is why some of those exhibiting this lack not only excellent subjects of comedy—e.g., Euthydemos—but even may be said to help make comedy possible. For an explanation of why Euthydemos is funny rather than the Tragic Hero he appears to wish he were, see Leo Strauss, “On the Euthydemos,” Interpretation, 1 (1970): 1–20.
In Book II of the *Social Contract* Rousseau expounds his doctrine of law by presenting it as a consequence of the principles established in Book I. At the very beginning of this exposition (Chapter 2), the theme of interest and justice makes its appearance. The conflict of private interests makes the establishment of political society necessary. The agreement of private interests makes a political order founded on the common interest possible. If sovereignty is declared inalienable, this is, in the final analysis, because, as we learn in this chapter, "the private will tends, by its nature, to preferences, and the general will to equality."

In the next chapter the theme of interest-justice makes its appearance in a curious form, in the tension between the true principles of political justice and the private advantage of those who write about those principles: "If these writers [Grotius and Barbeyrac] had adopted true principles, all difficulties would have been removed and they would have always been consistent; but they would have told the melancholy truth and only paid court to the people. Now truth does not lead to fortune, and the people do not give ambassadorships, chairs or pensions."

Rousseau turns next to the question of whether the general will can err. This question is all-important because the general will arises from "the total alienation of each individual with all his rights." In attempting to answer this question in Chapter 3, he discusses how the private interest of all individuals can be transformed into the common interest and under what conditions such a transformation can be depended on to occur. Without entering into the difficult questions of what Rousseau means when he speaks of eliminating from the sum of private wills those which have cancelled each other out, or of how the difference between the general will and the will of all is to be understood, one can summarize his conditions for relying on the transformation of the private will into the general will as follows: 1) the people engaging in deliberation of the issue must be "sufficiently informed"; 2) the result of the deliberation must not be distorted by factional intrigue; factions should be completely absent or, if this should prove impossible, there should be so many of them that none would be able to distort the assembly's decisions.

However, even if the popular assembly can be relied on to reach sound decisions under these conditions, the fact that the conditions exist must be accounted for. It is noteworthy that Rousseau, in this chapter, ascribes the absence of factional influence on public deliberation to the artful contrivances of unusual individuals such as Lycurgus, Solon, Numa, and Servius, rather than to any popular assembly. (Rousseau does not explain here what it is that moves these individuals, as well as those without whose advice the public would not be "suffici-

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34 II, 2, 5 (pp. 370–71).
ently informed," to transcend their private interest at a time when private interest has not been transformed into public interest: he will discuss this question in the sequel.)

In Chapter 4 Rousseau pursues the question of what guarantees the individual has that there will be no abuse of the sovereign authority at whose mercy he has placed himself. He offers the security afforded by his requirement that every act of the general will must be general in its effect, and by the fact that each member of the assembly will be thinking of that effect before deciding how to cast his vote. This "proves that the equality of right and the notion of justice that it produces derives from each man's preference for himself and consequently from the nature of man."35

In the next chapter, Rousseau examines how it can be in anyone's interest to put his life at the mercy of an authority which has the right to deprive him of it when it thinks proper. Finally, in Chapter 6, he derives from the preceding discussion a new doctrine of law from which it follows that every act of the general will must be a law and that every law must be an act of the general will. When he turns, in this chapter, from law as law to the definite laws which a people must enact if they are to establish a working political order the problems left unsolved in the discussion of whether the general will can err suddenly reappear.

Laws, properly speaking, are only the conditions of civil association. The People subject to laws should be their author; only those associating should regulate the conditions of society: but how will they regulate them? Will it be by common agreement, by a sudden inspiration? Does the body politic have an organ to declare its will? Who will give it the foresight necessary to formulate and publish its acts in advance, and how will it announce them in the hour of need? How will a blind multitude which often does not know what it wants [veut], because it rarely knows what is good for it, execute for itself so great and difficult an enterprise as a system of legislation? Of itself the people always wants [veut] the good, but of itself it does not always see it. The general will is always right, but the judgement that guides it is not always enlightened. It [the people] must be made to see objects as they are, sometimes as they should appear to it, [it must be] shown the good road that it seeks, protected from the seduction of private wills, times and places must be brought close to its eyes and the attractions of present and sensible advantages balanced by the danger of distant and hidden evils. Private individuals see the good that they reject: the public wants [veut] the good that it does not see. All stand equally in need of guidance: the former must be obliged to bring their wills into conformity with their reason; the latter must be taught to know what it wants [veut]. Then from public enlightenment the union of understanding and will in the social body will result. . . . This is what makes a Legislator necessary.36

If all the benefits men sought from political society were such that they could not be enjoyed unless they were shared, there would be no

35 II, 4, 5 (p. 373).
36 II, 6, 10 (p. 380).
need for Rousseau to raise the question of how to secure the cooperation of the more able members of society, as he does in the passage quoted. Yet, although some of the benefits that political society can confer, such as political freedom, are manifestly incapable of being enjoyed unless they are shared, not all its benefits are of this kind. The pleasure of commanding, for example, which Rousseau mentioned in Chapter 2 as the compensation which those who rule receive from their exertions, is lessened by being shared, and the more it is shared, the more it is lessened. Political freedom, according to Rousseau, requires the greatest possible denial of that pleasure because it requires ruling to be shared to the greatest possible degree. The question which he now raises is why the abler members of society, whose advice is needed for the deliberations of the assembly, would find it in their interest to favor a political order which treats them as equal to those less able than themselves. Will they not be more likely to act for private advantage as Grotius and Barbeyrac allegedly did? It is important to bear in mind that Rousseau is not asking how a free society can secure the allegiance of its abler members once it is in being. Rather, he asks what will induce men of superior ability, without whose guidance such a society cannot come into being, to help bring it into being in the first place. When society is first forming, "private individuals see the [public] good which they reject; the public wants the [public] good which it does not see."

Rousseau has quietly led the reader back to the question of how political societies were first formed, with the difference that what seemed so easy in Book I now appears to be extraordinarily difficult. To surmount the difficulty, he turns to an individual of extraordinary ability, the legislator. As one might expect from what has gone before, he first asks why the legislator should have any interest in serving the public good.

His answer is as follows: what prompts the legislator to serve the public good is the fact that his ambition is too vast to be satisfied with honors paid only by his own people and only during his lifetime. He desires a glory that will reach beyond his people and his time. The legislator is so far above the desire for mere political ascendency that for the sake of the glory he seeks he will abdicate a throne, as Rousseau claims Lycurgus did, or will exile himself and starve himself to death, as Plutarch says Lycurgus did after he made the Spartans promise that they would make no changes in his laws until his return. The glory sought by the legislator will come from the recognition of the wisdom embodied in his work by those over whom he has no ascendency except the ascendency implied in that recognition. It is because his end tran-

37 I, 2, 3 (p. 352).
39 II, 7, 2 (p. 381).
40 II, 7, 1 and n. (p. 381).
scends the ends pursued in the political arena that he is capable of setting its affairs in order. The legislator somehow foreshadows the political philosopher and his possible effect on political life.\footnote{In the chapter on the legislator, Plato is referred to as a political philosopher. In the following chapter, he is referred to as a legislator (II, 8, 1 [p. 385]).} The legislator's interest and the common interest are not the same, according to Rousseau, but the one cannot be attained without the other.

This discussion raises the question of how Rousseau understands the relation between wisdom and consent in political life and how his understanding differs from that of the classics. The question is a large one, and there is space here for only a few comments. Rousseau tries to reconcile his belief that the people alone can enact laws binding on its members with his recognition of the need for wise guidance, particularly when the political order is being founded: he requires the legislator to secure the free consent of the people to his proposals, and makes this consent itself that which transforms these proposals into law.\footnote{II, 7, 7 (p. 383).} Obviously, then, much depends on the people for whom the legislator is devising a code, and, it is not surprising to find the chapter on the legislator followed by three chapters on the people.

In these chapters Rousseau will discuss what makes a people suited to accept sound laws. First, however, he disposes of one possibility: he denies that any people at the dawn of political society can possess enough political understanding to make proper use of its right of consent: "In order for a nascent people to be able to appreciate the sound maxims of politics and to follow the fundamental rules of reason of State, it would be necessary for the effect to be capable of becoming the cause, [it would be necessary] for the social spirit which must be the work of the founding to preside over the founding itself, and [it would be necessary] for men to be prior to laws what they must become as a result of them."\footnote{II, 7, 9 (p. 384).}

The legislator at the dawn of society must first create a people before that people can do what Rousseau requires of it, and this creation cannot take place in compliance with his principles of political right. The legislators whom he calls "fathers of nations" sought to win acceptance for the codes they had devised by making those for whom they were intended believe that the laws were divinely revealed and represented the will of the gods. The amazing durability of the laws of Moses and Mohammed, Rousseau declares, "still bear[s] witness to the great men who dictated them."\footnote{II, 7, 11 (p. 384). See Strauss, \textit{Natural Right and History}, pp. 287–89; these pages will be misunderstood if one overlooks the fact that in them Strauss is speaking of the \textit{early} legislator.}
assumption that all regimes had legitimate beginnings, for in the
beginning no such regime could have been born in conformity with
Rousseau's principles: "At first men had no other kings than the gods,
nor any government other than the theocratic." Political societies in
which men as men rule, and hence legitimate political societies in
particular, belong to a later period.\textsuperscript{45} When Rousseau speaks of
legislators other than fathers of nations, he assumes as a matter of
course that they will be drawing up codes for a people that is already in
existence.

Rousseau now turns to the description of a people suited to receive a
sound code of laws. He advises the legislator to seek a people free of the
defects of an ancient people and of those peculiar to a people in its
childhood. A people in its infancy still lacks the social spirit without
which the legislator cannot establish a good political society.\textsuperscript{46} An old
people, on the other hand, is too set in its ways to be capable of
accepting or desiring a new code of laws.\textsuperscript{47} Rousseau's prescription is
curious: the legislator must find a people that "combines the cohesiv-
ness [consistance] of an old people with the docility of a new one."\textsuperscript{48}

How this combination can be found is by no means clear, however,
except in one extraordinary case, mentioned below. The difficulty is not
lessened by the fact that while Rousseau mentions examples of peoples
suffering from the defects to be avoided,\textsuperscript{49} he gives no example of a
people that fulfills his requirements apart, again, from the exception
noted below, and from Corsica, which will also prove to be a member
of the extraordinary class.\textsuperscript{50} The other members of that class form a
rather impressive list. They are Sparta, Rome, Holland and Switzerland.

The extraordinary class makes its appearance while Rousseau is dis-
cussing the reasons why a legislator should avoid attempting to frame
laws for an old people. In the course of this discussion, he draws the
reader's attention to the fact that there is a strange exception to this
rule, a people which is exceptional because it has the unusual attribute
of being at one and the same time as docile as a people in its childhood,
as vigorous as a people in its youth, and as cohesive as a people in its
old age:

This does not mean that, just as certain diseases throw men's heads into con-
fusion and destroy the memory of the past, violent epochs are not sometimes
found in the lifetime of States in which revolutions do to peoples what certain
crises do to individuals, in which horror of the past replaces loss of memory, and
in which the State, set aflame by civil wars, is reborn so to speak from its ashes
and recovers the vigor of youth in emerging from the arms of death. Such was

\textsuperscript{45} IV, 8, 1 (p. 460).
\textsuperscript{46} II, 8, 5 (p. 386).
\textsuperscript{47} II, 8, 1–2 (pp. 384–85).
\textsuperscript{48} II, 10, 5 (p. 391).
\textsuperscript{49} II, 8, 1, 5 (pp. 385–86).
\textsuperscript{50} II, 10, 6 (p. 391).
Sparta in the time of Lycurgus, such was Rome after the Tarquins, and such among us were Holland and Switzerland after the expulsion of the tyrants.51

Rousseau declares the kind of revolutionary crisis described in the quoted passage to be extremely infrequent. It can only occur once in the lifetime of a people, and only occur among a people which has not yet grown completely accustomed to a fully developed code of political law. Even under these conditions, in order for anything good to come of the crisis, it must be followed by a period of calm during which men enjoy "abundance and peace." Should that calm give way to a storm provoked by war, famine, or sedition, the opportunity for establishing a sound political life vanishes. In a paragraph that, curiously enough, begins with the very words of the paragraph quoted just before, and that ends with almost the same word, Rousseau declares:

This does not mean that many governments have not been established during these storms; but then it is these governments which destroy the State. Usurpers always bring about or choose these times of trouble to get destructive laws passed, under the cover of public fear, which the people would never adopt when calm [de sangroid]. The choice of the moment for legislation is one of the surest marks by which one can distinguish the work of the Legislator from that of the Tyrant.52

Given the difficulty of meeting all of these conditions, as well as others mentioned by Rousseau, a rejuvenating revolutionary crisis is obviously not a model for imitation. However, he did believe that every political order which deeply interested him and which he admired has passed through such a crisis: the importance of Rome and of Sparta, as described by Plutarch, is generally recognized, and Switzerland and Holland were for him modern examples of the successful resistance to tyranny on the part of simple, hard-working, and frugal men. (Switzerland and Holland also showed how much can be accomplished in constructing confederations of free states.) As for Corsica, at the end of his discussion of the people, Rousseau mentions the Corsicans as the only people in Europe fit for legislation. Corsica's rebellion against Genoese rule served as the chief contemporary example in the Enlightenment of a successful struggle for political freedom prior to the American Revolution.54 Even the Poland represented by the Confederation of Bar, the Poland to which Rousseau addressed his Considerations, was said by him to have passed through the kind of crisis described in the passage quoted above.55 Thus the supreme importance for Rousseau of the exceptional class of peoples we have been discussing cannot be seriously doubted.

51 II, 8, 3 (p. 385).
52 II, 10, 4 (p. 390).
53 III, 16, 6 (p. 427).
54 Sven Stelling Michaud, Introduction, Projet de constitution pour la Corse, O.C., III, p. cxcix.
55 Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne (O.C., III, pp. 961, 969-70).
We may now understand somewhat more clearly why Rousseau thought that free political societies would always remain an exception on earth. However, what did Rousseau think the prospects for freedom would be in those places, such as Europe, where it could flourish and where it had flourished once? His conclusions would surely be influenced by the fact that he saw a general age of revolutions approaching in Europe and by the fact that he expected his teaching to receive recognition from posterity.⁵⁶ Beyond such general expectations, however, there is no reason to believe that Rousseau thought he could discern the political future of mankind any more than we think we can, nor could he rely on the faith in Progress to show him the things that he could not see. Now that the belief in Progress is no longer axiomatic in the West, and perhaps not even in the East, it is at least an open question whether Rousseau's understanding of freedom and of revolution is not more subtle, powerful and adequate than is that of some of his friendly, though condescending, progressivist critics.

Rousseau's belief in the democratic character of all legitimate government has enjoyed great success. Thus we find the most diverse regimes describing themselves as democracies on the one hand and being criticized for failing to be "genuinely democratic" on the other. What distinguishes Rousseau's views of "genuine" democracy from those one often encounters today is that his beliefs regarding such a democracy were not vague. He presented a clear, incisive, and sober account of what it would mean for men to live in a "genuine democracy" and of the conditions under which one would be likely to find such a regime established. If Rousseau's results appear too narrow to accommodate the possibilities of relatively decent constitutional rule, one may be compelled to ask whether decent government may not be better accounted for by the political philosophy of the premodern Western tradition than by the modern principles which Rousseau inherited and radicalized and which he articulated with unsurpassed clarity and force.⁵⁷

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⁵⁶ See Strauss, Natural Right and History, pp. 259–60.
For Marx, philosophy is both an expression of and a cause of man's alienation. It is an expression of alienation because it is necessarily based on the empirical divorce of man's productive life from his spiritual life. Philosophy reflects this divorce as it arbitrarily posits a spiritual world that is totally distinct from the real, empirical world of men, thus giving an ontological significance to man's social limitations without realizing that that is what it is doing. Having projected a pure world of spirit, philosophy then evaluates man from its self-generated spiritual standpoint, ignoring, minimizing, and even deprecating man's real, material productivity and all the relations that derive from it. For Marx, however, the philosopher's spiritual world is a fantasy. It is a product of the philosopher's need to overestimate the power and importance of thought. Thus the philosopher's entire procedure is grounded on his mistaken assumption that there is a pure domain of thought against which everything that actually exists empirically is measured and found wanting.

This critique suggests that Marx's argument is directed exclusively against idealist philosophy and that what he is aiming at is a simple return to materialism. This impression, however, is only partially correct. For while Marx demands a recognition of the truth of materialism, he is also quick to point out its limitations. Materialism is insufficient for two reasons: first, it ignores the active side of man's productive powers; and second, it tends to exempt itself from its own materialist premise. Thus Marx's critique is directed against both materialism and idealism from an entirely new standpoint, which Marx calls naturalism. Marx's naturalist doctrine is meant to combine the partial truth of both idealism and materialism, a truth which is obscured when either position is taken to the exclusion of the other. Thus Marx's naturalism incorporates idealism's emphasis on man's free spontaneity and materialism's emphasis on the primacy of the material conditions of life. By preserving the truth of both idealism and materialism, Marx claims not only to overcome the onesidedness of each, but also to overcome the limitations of all philosophy as such. It is this aim which represents the underlying ground and the real driving force of all Marx's critical endeavors. For Marx, the philosophical standpoint itself is deficient and must, therefore, be transcended. Yet this transcendence is no simple abolition or annihilation; rather, it incorporates
and hence preserves the positive achievements of philosophy by realizing them in the actual behavior of men and the organization of their societies. Still, however complicated and subtle Marx's conception of this transcendence may be, the really important point and the striking fact is that Marx believes that philosophy as such must be abandoned.

Having grasped the limitations of philosophical thought, Marx launches into a critique of philosophy so filled with contempt and ridicule that even Nietzsche's attacks sometimes seem mild by comparison. This hostility derives not only from Marx's belief that he has discovered the root errors of philosophy but also from his annoyance with what he takes to be the philosopher's typically haughty and pompous attitude toward the realm of worldly affairs, that is, the realm of the non-philosophers. Marx relentlessly attacks the philosopher's condescending stance, and tries to make him appear completely ridiculous. Marx's own tone, which unfailingly conveys the sense that philosophy is ridiculous and absurd, is as telling as his actual arguments themselves. Thus in the last analysis, what provokes Marx's contempt is his exasperation with the professional knower's arrogant and inflated assertions that he possesses superior knowledge, for the philosopher, the man who makes the greatest claims to know, remains fundamentally ignorant concerning himself, his activity, and the conditions which make his activity possible.

The philosopher's ignorance is rooted in his misunderstanding of the importance of history and production. The philosopher never pays sufficient attention to the fact that the development of society and men's ideas about society depends, above all, upon the level of development of the productive forces. It is the productive forces which, it is important to note, necessarily expand as history develops, which establish the horizon in which thinking and acting are possible because they provide the concrete means whereby men experience and become aware of the degree of their freedom and power, both in relation to other men and in relation to nature. Thus because the philosopher abstracts from the world of history and production, he fails to see how he is inextricably a product of both. Moreover, it is only because philosophers have minimized the importance of these two factors that they feel free to turn away from the realm of human affairs toward a world of pure reason, which is taken to be both independent of empirical reality and the true source of meaning and guidance. Yet this ideal world is not autonomous. Rather, it is a product of men who think and act only within a specific set of historical conditions which depend upon the level of development of the productive forces and which evolve independent of men's will. Thus it is the autonomy of the productive forces which ultimately accounts for the limitations of philosophical thought, for regardless of how philosophers interpret the world, it continues to evolve in its own way according to its own set of
laws. Thus, interestingly enough, like the philosopher, Marx also believes in an autonomous world, but for Marx it is not the world of pure ideas but the world of man's material production.

Seen in this respect, the philosopher's work is no different from any other kind of work, for the "production of ideas, of conceptions of consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material relationships of men. . ."\(^1\) Having discovered the true significance of production, Marx claims to overcome the central illusion of philosophy, namely, that thought can be divorced from its social, economic, and historical context. Marx's new interpretation of thought corrects this mistake, for it is based on the assumption that "conceiving, thinking, and the intellectual relationships of men appear as the direct result of their material behavior."\(^2\) This is so because man is inextricably embedded, in all essential respects, within the material conditions of life; thus his ideas are always ideas about his needs and the conditions which will satisfy his needs. Because man is essentially a creature of need, thought remains circumscribed by the reality of needs and the possibilities of satisfying them.

The relationship between man's thought and his empirical conditions is summarized most succinctly in the following formulation in the *German Ideology*: "Consciousness does not determine life but life determines consciousness."\(^3\) The difference between these two conceptions is as follows: "In the first view, the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second, it is the real individuals themselves as they exist in real life, and consciousness is considered only as their consciousness."\(^4\)

This somewhat awkward passage is again meant to stress the importance of man's needs. Here, however, a more general reason for its importance is given: man is a being whose primary concern is life; hence the reality of life possesses a significance which can never be surpassed. Only after this elementary fact is given its proper recognition does the significance of another aspect of man's existence arise, namely, that man also possesses consciousness. Consciousness is thus but one aspect of a being whose most basic condition is life. Consciousness, therefore, is never wholly free; it is always "burdened"\(^5\) with the prior necessity of maintaining life. Thus, to say that consciousness determines life requires, in effect, a total abstraction from life, for consciousness then becomes the sole defining characteristic of man. The true recognition of the reality of life necessarily implies that life is

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 415.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 421.
the overriding reality that determines man's condition. Thus what controls consciousness and reveals its ontological limitation is life, the "actual life process of men" as they produce together to sustain this process. This recognition then becomes, in turn, the true foundation for philosophy.

According to Marx, the immediate cause of the split between consciousness and life is the division of labor. In fact, the division of labor arises only as the separation between mental and material labor becomes definitive. Once this division has been established, consciousness divorces itself from its roots in material reality and comes to interpret itself as being independent of all empirical factors. In doing this, it unconsciously inverts the true relations between thought and reality: pure thought becomes the true world, and the real world becomes the world of mere appearances. With the division of labor, "consciousness can really boast of being something other than consciousness of existing practice, of really representing something without representing something real."7

Because of philosophy's tendency to abstract from empirical reality, Marx equates philosophy with religion. For both posit an ideal realm which is the source of everything that appears empirically, including those things which are actually done by man. Since this realm is understood to be beyond man's control, it becomes an object of worship which necessarily degrades man, for he is forced to construe the results of his own activity as a product of a higher being who is both unknown and autonomous. Thus man becomes enslaved by his own activity: he attributes everything of value to thought or to God and nothing to himself.

In the section of the Holy Family called "The Mystery of Speculative Construction," Marx parodies the religious way in which philosophy inevitably interprets everyday life. To illustrate his point, he constructs what he takes to be a typically philosophical analysis of a familiar object of daily experience, in this case, a piece of fruit.

This philosopher begins his analysis by forming the idea "the fruit" from the variety of fruits that he habitually comes in contact with. For the philosopher, the essential thing about these different fruits is that they are all regarded as being merely the phenomenal forms of the idea "the fruit," which, in contrast to the idea, have no real reality. "The actual fruits," says Marx, "are taken to be only apparent fruits whose true essence is the 'Substance,' 'the fruit.'"8

After having constructed the idea "the fruit," the philosopher then tries to explain how the variety of actual fruits can appear as products of a single abstract idea. The philosopher solves this dilemma by inter-

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6 Ibid., p. 415.
7 Ibid., p. 423.
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preting the Idea as a “self-differentiated, dynamic”9 movement which generates from itself, as an inner process, the full diversity of all particular fruits. Thus the ideal fruit is conceived as containing the totality of all actual fruits. To make this process more plausible, it helps if we regard the idea as undergoing a continual process of “incarnation”10 in each individual fruit. A miracle is thus created: all real, actual, naturally produced, and naturally existing fruits appear as the product of “an unreal creature of the understanding, ‘the fruit.’”11 Each fruit manifests itself only as “‘the fruit’ posits itself as pear as apple”;12 consequently, “in the apple, ‘the fruit’ gives itself an applely existence, in the pear, a peary existence.”13

The upshot of this speculative procedure, and the really serious point that Marx means to make here, is that by regarding the whole of the empirical world as being essentially products of the Idea, philosophy endows man’s actually existing world with a mystical quality because he is forced to “construe as absolutely necessary and universal”14 all that is merely accidental and transient, thereby producing “the most unreasonable and unnatural subservience to the object.”15 In other words, the ironic consequence of the philosopher’s method is that although he starts with the premise that thought is independent of empirical reality, he necessarily ends his speculation totally dependent on this reality because he is forced to explain everything empirical as an inevitable result of the Idea, with the consequence that he is incapable of imagining that the world could be otherwise. In this way, the philosopher helps preserve the status quo; by explaining the world as a product of thought, he becomes its unconscious apologist and spokesman.

Nevertheless, despite the philosopher’s fundamental errors and deceptions, he still may serve a useful function, for, as an alienated expression of the real world, he unconsciously reflects certain truths about the world, albeit in a confused and misleading way, since he grounds his insights not on man’s activity but on the activity of a divine, transcendental subject. Thus, if the philosopher’s work is taken out of its abstract form and translated back into the language of man’s real material interests, his insights can be salvaged. Marx says of Hegel, for instance, that he “very often given an actual presentation, a presentation of the matter itself, within his speculative presentation.”16 Marx goes on to say that Hegel is so mystifying because the reader takes the speculative account for the true account:

9 Ibid., p. 370.
10 Ibid., p. 371.
11 Ibid., p. 372.
12 Ibid., p. 371.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 374.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 373.
that is, he attributes the quality of being real to Hegel's speculative, abstract Subject and regards the actual subject, namely, man, as something unreal. Philosophical problems can be resolved, therefore, simply by discarding the philosopher's initial speculative assumptions which assert the primacy of some ideal subject, thus obscuring thought's true origin and referent, empirical reality.

This transition from speculation to empiricism is at the same time the transition from error to knowledge, from philosophy to science. In the *German Ideology*, Marx describes this transition: "Where speculation ends, namely in actual life, there real positive science begins as the representation of the practical activity and practical process of the development of men. Phrases about consciousness cease and real knowledge takes their place. With the description of reality, independent philosophy loses its medium of existence."17

Marx goes on to offer several examples of how a philosophical problem is resolved by turning to empirical reality. In his discussion of the controversy over whether the relationship of man to nature is one of harmony or discord, he says that this theoretical problem "collapses when we understand the celebrated unity of man and nature has always existed in varying forms in every epoch according to the lesser or greater development of industry just like the 'struggle' of man with nature right up to the development of his productive forces on a corresponding basis."18 Yet philosophy mistakenly speaks "of the antithesis of man and nature as if these were two separate 'things' and man did not always have before him a historical nature and a natural history. . ."19

Another instance of how a theoretical problem is resolved by looking to social practice occurs in one of Marx's discussions in the *German Ideology* of the problem of alienation. This problem, which is "so baffling to German theoreticians,"20 can be easily solved simply by abolishing private property, for since the institution of private property is the primary cause of man's alienation, once private property is abolished, alienation will disappear. In other words, alienation will cease to baffle German philosophers for the simple reason that men will no longer be alienated.

Thus for Marx man's theoretical perplexities arise only on the basis of an empirical situation which fails to fully realize man's essential being. The philosopher's theoretical problems merely reflect the non-philosopher's practical problems. A solution to the practical problem necessarily resolves the theoretical problem as well. The crucial premise which forms the basis for Marx's empiricism, therefore, is not only that philosophy is abstract, but also that all man's

18 Ibid., p. 436.
19 Ibid., p. 437.
20 Ibid., p. 426.
practical problems can be solved. It is important to underscore this point, for the significance of this premise and the justification for Marx's turn to empiricism is very revealing and is generally overlooked. His point—that all man's practical problems can be solved—is startling in its simplicity, and its radicalness, no doubt, is what accounts for its being generally ignored. Yet its role in the overall import of Marx's thought is decisive, for it highlights the Promethean spirit that animates all Marx's work, and it indicates, as well, the general limitations of his thought. For the idea that man can perfectly control his worldly environment is not only altogether fantastic, it is also not at all empirical, for the validity of this thesis can never be established from observation. It can only emerge on the basis of speculation, which Marx has already thoroughly discredited.

In any event, for Marx, the discovery of the root errors of philosophy leads to the abolition of philosophy. According to Marx, philosophy comes to an end for three reasons: first, because it deals only with its own self-created world of illusion; second, because on the other hand, as a purely theoretical study of man, philosophy has achieved its goal of absolute knowledge; and third, because once having gained this knowledge, philosophy finds its true realization in practice.

Philosophy comes to an end, therefore, for three contradictory reasons. On the one hand, Marx emphasizes that philosophy comes to an end because it is fundamentally incapable of arriving at the truth, and, on the other hand, he emphasizes that philosophy comes to an end because, indeed, it has grasped the truth. This contradiction is never really resolved by Marx, yet it is of great importance, for, like his assertion that all problems can be solved, it again underscores the inherent limitations of Marx's critique. The problem is always that in order to deny that philosophy can arrive at absolute truth, one first needs an absolute philosophy that can prove such a denial. The full scope of this problem emerges only when what is at issue is not the truth of any one philosophy but the truth of philosophy as such. What distinguishes Marx's critique in this regard from other such radical challenges is precisely that he denies that philosophy can gain the truth, and yet claims that he is himself in possession of that truth.

Marx does attempt at least a partial resolution of this dilemma by arguing that the true realization of philosophy is found not in theoretical knowledge but in social practice. By acknowledging the success and yet, at the same time, the limits of pure theory, and, conversely, by recognizing the importance of man's practical activities and the true extent of his species powers, philosophy can be incorporated into practice and can become reconciled with itself and the world. Still, despite this resolution, which in part preserves the importance of philosophy, the crucial point remains: philosophy as traditionally understood must be abolished.

Thus the main thrust of Marx's critique never changes: philosophy is
limited because it deals with knowledge divorced from its roots in practice. The most a philosopher can do, therefore, is to try to produce a correct awareness of existing conditions; he can never actually change them. This, says Marx, "goes as far as a theorist possibly can go without ceasing to be a theorist and philosopher." Because of the scope and centrality of man's productive powers, knowledge for its own sake, which is the raison d'être of philosophy, can never be man's ultimate aim.

The final reason why philosophy comes to an end, therefore, is that knowledge cannot be the ultimate goal of man, for the knowledge man gains in theory must be used to change the world in practice. What underlies what we have called Marx's empiricism is his belief that the full truth about man must become completely manifest in the real world of everyday life. Because man's essence ultimately coincides with his existence, what man's essence is will no longer be a matter for speculation: it will become clear to all. A legitimate need for speculation exists only as long as man's nature is is not empirically known. It was the earlier absence of empirical fulfillment that provoked man's wonder and desire to know. Thus in the final communist society, where man's true being will for the first time make its phenomenal appearance, practice becomes the mode by which man's true essence is revealed. Marx says, for example, that "communism is for us not a state of affairs still to be established, not an ideal to which reality will have to adjust. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of affairs." This is spelled out further in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts where it is stated that "It (communism) is the genuine resolution of the antagonism between man and man; it is the true resolution of the conflict between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species. It is the riddle of history solved and knows itself as this solution."

All this lies behind Marx's famous last thesis in his Theses on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." And yet, the irony of the original paradox of Marx's critique of philosophy and his resolution of the split between theory and practice remains, for Marx's empiricism necessarily depends upon the prior philosophical assumption that man's existence will correspond to his essence, since the realm of immediate experience does not automatically reveal this. Marx believed that the errors of abstraction could be overcome by turning to empirical reality, that which truly and unambiguously is. But since empirical reality does not immediately disclose its own meaning, man

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21 Ibid., p. 436.
22 Ibid., p. 426.
23 "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)," in ibid., p. 304.
24 "Theses on Feuerbach," in ibid., p. 401.
needs theory or theoretical assumptions to grasp this meaning. In other words, a simple return to empiricism is impossible. Marx himself admits as much in the first manuscript of the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts. There he makes the point that theory must grasp the true inner development of reality because this development is not immediately given. But having made this admission, he then minimizes or dismisses its significance because he is certain that he is in possession of the true philosophical method. It was on the basis of this belief, and, moreover, on the basis of the belief that empirical reality would, by itself, disclose the full truth about man that he said that he had settled his accounts with his philosophical conscience and had therefore turned to his scientific study of capitalism.

II

Marx developed this critique of philosophy in his study of Hegel, the Young Hegelians, Feuerbach, and the bourgeois political economists. His thought, in part, is meant to be a synthesis of all of them, seeing through their limitations and preserving their positive contributions. This aim highlights one of the striking facts about Marx’s work—namely, that although he remained fundamentally opposed to these thinkers, he nevertheless gained important insights from them which he more or less freely acknowledged. It has been said that Marx’s achievement lies more in his capacity to bring together ideas that were already current than in any discovery of wholly new ideas. While it is difficult to make a final judgment on this matter—since the principle of synthesis, which is doubtless the most important thing, does seem to be entirely new—it is certainly clear that Marx was deeply indebted to the thinkers he opposed, and this is particularly true in the field of philosophy. There, the two most important influences on Marx’s thinking were Hegel and Feuerbach, and we will now turn to Marx’s critique of their thought, which concentrates, by definition, on their limitations, but which also brings out certain positive contributions as well.

According to Marx, all the mistakes of Hegelian philosophy are rooted in the fact that Hegel begins his philosophy with an abstraction and thus can only end or conclude with a greater one. By defining man in terms of spirit, Hegel abstracts from the importance of man’s practical activity and his natural environment, thereby misinterpreting man, his essential activity, the nature of the objective world, and the affirmation man gains in relation to this world.

Hegel’s initial error, then, is that he conceives man primarily as self-consciousness. The only self which Hegel recognizes, therefore, is an abstract self totally divorced from all real determinate aspects of actual life, and the only activity that he recognizes is the activity of
thinking, for thinking is the most important act that consciousness performs since it establishes the greatest certainty of reality through the possibility of acquiring absolute knowledge: "The way in which consciousness is and the way in which something is for it is knowing. Knowing is its only act. Hence something comes to exist for consciousness in so far as consciousness knows that something."  

But although Hegel mistakenly defines man in terms of self-consciousness, thereby falsely elevating speculative thought over all other forms of experience, he still remains illuminating, for he understands that man is alienated and that he can develop himself only through a process of alienation. The insight that man is alienated is one of the three most important ideas that Marx acknowledges as having learned from Hegel (the other two being the notion of negation, which in part accounts for man's alienation, and the concept of man's self-development through history). Yet Marx fundamentally revises Hegel's understanding of alienation. For Hegel, man is alienated because all man's actual concrete, sensual relations are opposed to thought. All contradictions that Hegel perceives revolve around the "contradiction between abstract thinking and sensuous actuality." Thus for Hegel, the point is not that man is alienated in his actual relations because they are not as they ought to be; rather, man's alienation arises as the whole domain of actuality itself exists in opposition to thought. Because Hegel understands man only in terms of self-consciousness, he never sees that alienation arises out of the contradictions within actuality itself. Thus although Hegel is profound in recognizing that man is alienated, he errs in his understanding of what that alienation ultimately consists of.

Hegel not only misunderstands what man is; he also misunderstands the nature of the external world in which man lives. Hegel interprets the world only as it is an object for thought. Marx emphasizes that, in one sense, Hegel continually misinterprets the world because he recognizes it only as it is incorporated within thought. The defect of this procedure is that in analyzing different objects, thought necessarily abstracts from the object its most important characteristic, namely, its sensuous actuality. Once within thought, the object is no longer the object "out there"; that is, the object is no longer regarded as a concrete, sensuous, external thing. Instead, it becomes an idea, a "thought entity." One consequence of this denial of the sensuousness of the object is that in reflecting on the world Hegel attributes reality not to the world or to man's actual feelings and experiences in relation to the world, but only to those experiences as they are absorbed within thought. True experience therefore must always be mediated through

25 "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)," p. 328.
26 Ibid., p. 320.
27 Ibid., p. 321.
reflection; it is never inherent in the actual experience itself. In a famous passage in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx says that the upshot of Hegel's method is that "my authentic religious existence is my existence in *philosophy of religion*, my authentic political existence is my existence in *philosophy of law*, my authentic natural existence is my existence in *philosophy of nature*, my authentic aesthetic existence is my existence in *philosophy of art*, and my authentic human existence is my existence in philosophy."\(^{28}\)

The main point that Marx makes against Hegel, however, is not that Hegel sees the objective world only as it is an object for thought, but that Hegel understands the sensuous world as being essentially a product of thought, and that hence what it really is, in its essence, is thought or spirit, something that is non-natural and non-objective. For Hegel, the real, material, sensuous external world is actually thought establishing itself "as object."\(^{29}\) Thus, the sensuous objectivity of the world is "not to be understood here as self-externalizing sensuousness open to the light and to the sensibility of sensuous man."\(^{30}\) On the contrary, sensuous reality is conceived as "objectified self-consciousness, self-consciousness as object."\(^{31}\)

In one sense, this account clearly contradicts Marx's earlier statement that Hegel sees the world only as it is reflected in thought, for here he implies that indeed Hegel does grasp the significance of the world's material aspect, since he recognizes that this aspect is something other than thought. The thrust of this part of Marx's criticism, then, is directed against another characteristic Hegelian failing. It is not so much that thought fails to recognize materiality as that, when it does, it denies it by interpreting it as a "product of abstract spirit and hence phases of mind."\(^{32}\) In other words, thought ultimately interprets the world as an aspect of itself. The motive behind what is in effect Hegel's spiritual interpretation of nature is the need or desire for unity or reconciliation. For since thought regards everything other than itself as something alien, the overcoming of its alienation requires that it deny everything that is other than itself. Because Hegel views nature exclusively from the standpoint of thought, he can understand it only as "externalization, error, a defect which ought not to be."\(^{33}\) For Hegel, nature as nature is necessarily something deficient: "Hegel makes the externality of nature, its contrast to thought, its defect. And as much as nature is distinct from abstraction it is something defective. Something which is defective not only for me in my eyes but also in itself has something which it lacks."\(^{34}\)

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 330.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 323.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 336.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 332.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 320.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 336.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
Because Hegel misunderstands the nature of the object and the nature of the subject, he also misunderstands the process of affirmation and transcendence by the subject. The transcendence of the object arises when the object is seen as an externalization of thought. Thus the affirmation of the object depends upon a negation of the object as object: what is affirmed in the object is not its objectivity but its spirituality. Thus, says Marx, the object appears to consciousness as something "vanishing." The annihilation of the object, the fact that it "vanishes," represents an affirmation of consciousness because it reveals to consciousness that the object is actually itself in its own otherness. Thus the transcendence of the object depends, above all, on its being denied as a sensuous, external thing that is independent of consciousness. Consciousness interprets the negation of the object positively, for it can then claim that it "knows the non-existence of the distinction between the object and itself."36

Thus Hegel's speculative affirmation is abstract and unreal, for it never affirms the real, empirical world as it actually is. Hegel can only affirm the world as he denies it: "transcendence, therefore, has a special role in which denial and preservation, denial and affirmation, are bound together." In this respect, Hegel's transcendence of the object comes at the expense of both the object and the commonsense, everyday, first-hand experience of the object. Marx draws out this consequence in these words: "In this respect he [Hegel] thus opposes both the actual nature of the object and the immediate unphilosophical knowledge—the unphilosophical concepts—of that nature. He therefore contradicts conventional concepts."38

Yet there is another aspect of Hegel's notion of transcendence that Marx finds even more disturbing; namely, that Hegel affirms the unreasonable world of the status quo. Although Marx had previously argued that Hegel's affirmation of the world is entirely spurious because it is based on thought's negation of the object, Marx concedes that looked at from another point of view Hegel does, indeed, affirm the actual world; however, it is a world which is irrational. Hegel is able to effect this affirmation because, having recognized the world as the externalization of thought, he believes that whatever exists represents a legitimate phase in the development of mind. This process of legitimation of affirmation takes place in two steps; first, consciousness "claims to be immediately the other of itself, sensibility, actuality, life."39 Consciousness claims to have transcended actuality and life, for it recognizes that the essence of both is consciousness itself in another mode; hence neither can be alien to it. In the second step,

36 Ibid., p. 328.
37 Ibid., p. 329.
38 Ibid., p. 331.
39 Ibid., p. 328.
having transcended actuality and life in this manner, consciousness then claims that it "reabsorbs this externalization and objectivity and thus is at one with itself in its other being as such."\(^{40}\) In other words, consciousness negates and thus transcends the object, and then, having transcended it, consciousness "re-establishes"\(^ {41}\) the object, thereby affirming it as it actually is in its empirical form. The Hegelian process of affirmation ends, therefore, with the assertion that the world is as it ought to be. Thus Hegel's concept of transcendence leads to the strange doctrine that we must accept the world without change, exactly as it is.

Marx attacks this notion because it legitimates a status quo which still deprives man of his freedom. Contained in Hegel's concept of transcendence is "the root of Hegel's false positivism or of his merely apparent criticism."\(^ {42}\) For although Hegel claims to have transcended man's alienation, Marx argues that the very opposite is the case: Hegel not only fails to transcend man's alienation, he actually confirms it. By asserting that the world is the embodiment of the idea, Hegel says, in effect, that the world has become completely rational. Moreover, by claiming that the world is a product of thought, he blurs the distinction between the actual and the ideal, thus destroying the standards that serve as the basis for worldly criticism. In discovering that the world is really spirit in its otherness, Hegel justifies this otherness, which turns out to be, when translated into the language of man's worldly relations, a condition of alienation and injustice that can still be overcome. This consequence of Hegel's thought is inevitable, since by presenting the process of transcendence as a process of thought, Hegel discourages all activity that would lead to real political change. Thus Hegel's concept of transcendence is entirely abstract: it consists of thought's transcendence, not of the world, which would be impossible anyway, but of itself in its various interpretations of the world.

Arguing along these lines, Marx reveals the hidden way in which Hegel reconciles himself with his own conflict-ridden world. From this aspect of Hegel's thought, all conventional concepts receive their "ultimate justification."\(^ {43}\) Although Marx had argued earlier that Hegel contradicted commonsense opinion, since he elevated philosophical reflection at the expense of immediate experience, he concludes that the real effect of Hegel's philosophy is to confirm commonsense opinion. Thus Marx ends this part of his analysis with the following words: "There can thus no longer be any question about Hegel's accommodation in regard to religion, the state, etc., since this lie is the lie of his principle."\(^ {44}\)

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 329.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 331.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 329.
Having shown that Hegel’s method begins and ends in an abstraction which actually serves to confirm man’s real alienation, Marx concludes his reflections with a critique of Hegel’s concept of intuition. Intuition becomes all-important for Hegel because at the culmination of his system he comes to realize that the absolute idea is merely pure thought divorced from any real content. It is thus a pure abstraction and hence a “nothing.”\(^\text{45}\) In order to give the idea substantiality, Hegel turns to nature, for it alone has real, determinate reality. This turn to nature explains Hegel’s transition from abstract thinking to intuition, which is in effect his turn from The Logic to his Philosophy of Nature. Having become aware of his own abstractness, Hegel must “abandon”\(^\text{46}\) speculation and “decide”\(^\text{47}\) on a new method of inquiry, namely, intuition. Yet this turn to intuition is not only based on thought’s awareness of its own limitation; it is also motivated by a kind of mystical sense which Marx says is really nothing more than a feeling of boredom. “The mystical feeling which drives a philosopher from abstract thinking to intuition is boredom, the longing for a content.”\(^\text{48}\)

Yet the abstract philosopher’s desire for concreteness can never be satisfied through intuition, for the nature he intuits is still abstract because it is conceived as being isolated from man, and because it is still understood only as an externalization of thought—with the difference, however, that now the sensuous quality of nature is given recognition. But this recognition is incomplete, for nature’s sensuous qualities are understood only as they repeat, albeit in a different mode, the movement of thought. Thus the philosopher’s turn to intuition only confirms his original abstraction; it is merely “his conscious re-enactment of the process of producing his abstraction.”\(^\text{49}\) According to Marx, Hegel is unable to break out of his world of abstraction. Even his turn to intuition fails: rather than grasping the externality of nature in its own right, he understands it only in relation to thought. Hence it remains a “nothing, a nothing proving itself to be nothing.”\(^\text{50}\)

Marx calls the true philosophy, the one which resolves Hegel’s speculative mysteries and obfuscations, naturalism. Marx draws three important conclusions from his naturalist premise. The first is that man has active, natural, objective capacities through which he creates or produces things which are essential to him because they satisfy his needs. As such, they are not simply another part of the objective world; both their establishment and their being serve as objective confirmations of man. Thus Marx argues, against Hegel, that man’s natural

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 333.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 334.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 335.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 336.
productivity is wholly in keeping with, and actually is an affirmation of, his essential being. In fact, his affirmation comes only through production which satisfies his needs. Marx makes this clear in the following passage: "The fact that man is a corporeal, actual, sentient, objective being with natural capacities means that he has actual, sensuous, objects for his nature as objects of his life expression, or that he can only express his life in actual, sensuous objects." 51

Man affirms himself through production because he is a being who lives essentially within the world of nature. Because Marx is not misguided by false speculative assumptions, he claims that he can and does remain faithful to the significance of nature and to man’s productivity in relation to it. The mistake that Hegel makes is that he understands the relation between man and nature only in terms of opposition. Thus in order to resolve this opposition, he is compelled to deny the importance both of nature and of man’s productivity. When this assumption of an opposition is removed, however, the true relation—which is a relation of harmony—is revealed, and the significance of the natural world and man’s productivity is restored. Concerning the act of production, Marx says, for example, that "the establishing (of objects) is not the subject but the subjectivity of objective capacities whose action must therefore also be objective." 52

The second important consequence of Marx’s naturalism is that nature is recognized both as an object which is independent of man and as a domain which is necessary for the satisfaction of man’s needs. What Marx wants to emphasize here is that the independence of nature does not detract from man’s essential freedom and dignity because he retains an important relation with nature, since despite its independence it is still necessary for the satisfaction of his needs. To the extent that it is, man’s relation to it remains positive. Thus what establishes nature’s affirmative significance for man, whatever other differences between man and nature there may be, is the fact that man needs nature. Because he does, his relation to nature is always affirmative.

The last important consequence that follows from Marx’s naturalist doctrine is his assertion that nature establishes the possibility of relations between men since what they essentially have in common is the need to satisfy their natural wants. Moreover, these wants are not merely directed to the satisfaction of immediate biological necessities; they go beyond this domain to include a genuine need for others. Nature is thus the ultimate basis of man’s sociality.

The full meaning of Marx’s naturalist premise, however, is not exhausted by the enumeration of the above three points, for on reflection it becomes clearer that the final significance of Marx’s naturalism is actually the very opposite of what it appears to be at

51 Ibid., p. 325.
52 Ibid.
first glance. What becomes evident is that, in fact, Marx reverses the priority of nature and man: the really decisive point is not that man is a part of nature or that nature is essentially different from consciousness, but that man needs nature and that the reality of his need establishes the true meaning of nature. The fundamental fact is that because nature can be made to satisfy man’s needs, it must be understood as being essentially created for him. Thus Marx’s final point is that man transcends nature as it becomes the means through which he satisfies his needs.

Although Marx maintains that man is a part of nature and therefore affirms himself through his relation to it, he also asserts that man’s immediate relation to nature is not affirmative and thus not yet human. This is because nature does not immediately act to satisfy man’s needs. While man is a part of nature because he is a sensuous being and because nature is necessary for the satisfaction of his needs, this is not the final ground on which Marx’s affirmation of man’s relation to nature rests. For since nature does not immediately satisfy man’s needs, in order for man to affirm himself through his relation to nature, he must first overcome his initial relation to it so that it will satisfy his needs. Thus the true relation to nature is a negative one, which, however, becomes positive as man’s overcoming of nature increases. Man’s affirmation of nature is actually based, therefore, on the fact that he overcomes nature through his labor.

Marx calls the totality of activities through which man overcomes nature history. History is man’s natural “genetic act” which, unlike all other natural processes, is “known and hence self-transcending.” The essential meaning of history, therefore, is that man has the capacity to transcend nature as it comes to satisfy more of man’s needs on an ever-increasing scale. Through history, man has visible proof that nature exists essentially for the satisfaction of his needs. Moreover, according to Marx, the overcoming of nature can be brought to the point where nature will eventually satisfy all man’s basic needs. At that point, history comes to an end. Thus the affirmation that man achieves in relation to nature is not a function of his being a part of nature, but of his being outside of nature in such a way that through production he can ultimately transcend nature completely. Through this transcendence, the truth concerning nature, man, and man’s relation to nature becomes manifest, for nature is revealed as being essentially for man, and man is revealed as being essentially for himself and is thus the highest being that is. At the end of history, man’s self-affirmation is complete, for he has finally become absolutely free.

Contained in Marx’s naturalist premise are the seeds of the very thing that he criticized in Hegel. For just as Hegel could only under-

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53 Ibid., p. 327.
54 Ibid.
stand nature as spirit externalized, so Marx can only understand nature as an object for man. Neither sees nature as an encompassing domain which includes man; instead, both assert that man essentially transcends nature. The parallels here between Hegel and Marx are striking. What is for Hegel the product of spirit is for Marx the product of labor. What in Hegel is a process of development, in which spirit externalizes itself in its other being as self-loss, in Marx is the process whereby labor externalizes itself in its other being, property, as self-loss. And finally, just as for Hegel the transcendence of alienation is achieved through thought's recognition of itself in its other being, so for Marx the transcendence of alienation is achieved through man's recognition that everything that is is either a product of his activity, or an object of his activity and need. In so far as Marx posits man as the being who essentially transcends nature, the defect or limitation of Marx's doctrine appears, ironically, to be the same limitation that Marx himself revealed in his analysis of Hegel: namely, that nature is understood merely as a phase in the development of something higher; consequently, as Marx said of Hegel, nature is finally conceived as a "nothing, a nothing proving itself to be nothing."55

III

According to Marx, Feuerbach was the first philosopher after Hegel to discover the importance of nature. As a consequence of his discovery he became the first thinker to seriously undermine Hegel's great system. Marx credits Feuerbach for having gained three crucial insights concerning the Hegelian method: first, he showed that philosophy was essentially an expression of man's alienation; second, he recognized the primacy of man's social relations; and third, he understood the defect of Hegel's concept of the negation of the negation, and hence the error inherent in his dialectical method as such. But whatever its virtues, Feuerbach's naturalism is deficient because, like Hegel, he abstracts from the real meaning of both nature and society.

Although Feuerbach recognizes the primacy of man's social relations, he fails to appreciate that these relations are not ones of harmony but of conflict. Since Feuerbach begins with the assumption that man's social relations are fundamentally harmonious, social conflict always appears to him as an aberration or accident. Yet the truth of the matter is exactly the reverse: all man's social relations are necessarily based on underlying social conflicts which can be resolved only through violent revolution. Because Feuerbach overlooks the pervasiveness of social conflict, he inevitably romanticizes all man's

55 Ibid., p. 336.
actual relations: "he knows no other 'human relationships' 'of man to man' than love and friendship, and these idealized."\(^{56}\)

But Feuerbach is abstract not only in his treatment of man's social relations; he is also abstract in his treatment of nature. This is because he fails to take into account the most important fact concerning nature, namely, that man transforms it through his labor. Feuerbach's discussion of nature is inadequate because he analyzes it independent of man and his productive activity. When Feuerbach deals with natural objects he forgets that the decisive fact about them is not that they are part of nature, or in part produced by nature, but that they are worked upon and thus transformed by man. What is primary, therefore, is not what nature is without man, but what it becomes when man works upon it. Marx argues against Feuerbach's static view of nature by pointing out that "even the objects of the simplest 'sensuous certainty' are given to him [Feuerbach] only through social development, industry, and commercial relationships."\(^{57}\) The important thing about the world is not that man perceives it through his naturally given sense apparatus, but rather that man creates the world which he then perceives. The act of perception presupposes the act of producing. Production therefore is the necessary precondition for perception, and not the other way around. In a revealing passage in the *German Ideology*, Marx says that "The cherry tree, like almost all fruit trees, was transplanted into our zone by commerce only a few centuries ago, as we know, and only by this action of a particular society in a particular time has it become 'sensuous certainty' for Feuerbach."\(^{58}\) Moreover, he points out sarcastically that Feuerbach's abstraction from the importance of production leads him to forget how completely he is himself dependent on production: "So much is this activity, the continuous sensuous working and creating, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted for only a year, Feuerbach would find not only a tremendous change in the natural world but also would soon find missing the entire world of men and his own perceptual faculty, even his own existence."\(^{59}\)

According to Marx, Feuerbach is correct in his understanding that man is part of nature and that, going beyond other materialists, man is himself a "sensuous object."\(^{60}\) Nevertheless, Feuerbach fundamentally misunderstands the significance of man's sensuous nature because he fails to see that man is both a sensuous object and a historically productive subject, and that in producing for himself man decisively changes himself, and at the same time changes nature as well. Marx's crucial premise here is that nature is a realm whose essence as man

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56 "The German Ideology," p. 419.
57 Ibid., p. 418.
58 Ibid., p. 417.
59 Ibid., p. 418.
60 Ibid.
transforms it according to his own needs. In this sense, nature is itself historical, for it remains subordinate to man's productive capacity. Since Feuerbach abstracts from this historical dimension, his model of nature is always the nature that existed prior to man's productive relation to it. But, as Marx points out, as man continues to produce and extend the network of his production, the natural world in its pre-human state is steadily shrinking. It remains, he says, only "on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin." Thus Feuerbach's doctrine of nature stands refuted by the reality of history. What he never understands is that nature and man's relation to nature necessarily change through man's activity. Accordingly, Marx concludes his critique by saying: "As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he deals with history he is not a materialist. Materialism and history completely diverge with him. . . ." 

IV

To sum up: Marx's critique of philosophy is based on his insight into the inherent limitations of philosophy. Yet, paradoxically, it is also based on his belief that philosophy reveals certain important truths and, finally, the truth concerning man. Marx's own philosophy incorporates these truths: the truth of idealism, that man is his own creator; the truth of materialism, that man is a natural being and therefore a part of nature. Thus Marx's thought is a synthesis and transcendence of all previous philosophy but one which, however, finally abolishes philosophy. For Marx also believes that philosophy's final insight is its recognition that its true realization is found in practice because practice can incorporate the full meaning of philosophical truth. The abolition of philosophy coincides, therefore, with the complete actualization of man. Thus the abolition of philosophy signals the abolition of the hitherto seemingly eternal divergence between man's essence and his existence, between his potential and the empirically actual, between theory and practice, between freedom and necessity.

61 In this passage, it is important to realize that Marx is explicitly asserting his ultimate belief that nature will be completely absorbed into the historical process. Most interpreters of Marx ignore the significance of this fact and thus get bogged down in a contradiction which is revealed in its simplicity in chapter 11 (p. 183) of Robert Tucker's book Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. In his discussion there of the relation of nature to history, Tucker rightly emphasizes that in Marx's view nature is included within the historical domain; yet he then goes on to say that the historical process is actually restricted to "man-made nature" and not to nature simply. Tucker makes a similar mistake on p. 196, where he interprets Engels' statement that man will become the "conscious Lord of Nature" to mean only that man will come to master his technology. In other words, according to Tucker, Engels' statement has nothing to do with man's control of external nature itself.


63 Ibid., p. 419.
between the individual and society. In short, the abolition of philosophy becomes the precondition for the solution to all human problems, "and knows itself as this solution." 64

According to Marx, philosophy is characterized by one fundamental mistake: it posits thought as the only true reality. Philosophy ultimately seeks to explain all phenomena in terms of reason. This is its delusion. In Nietzschean terms, philosophy is a tyrannical expression of a blind will to power. In Marxian language, it is an alien and alienating activity because, by making reason the sole reality, philosophy overlooks the overwhelming importance of man's material condition. Yet it is this condition which establishes the real meaning and foundation of human life, for man is a needy being on the one hand, and a productive being on the other. Moreover, by claiming that only reason is real, philosophy remains uncritical or unphilosophical concerning its own activity. Thus it contradicts itself because it fails to reflect with sufficient seriousness upon its own foundations. Instead, it takes itself for granted and hence remains unaware of itself in two respects. First, it is unaware of its own arbitrary beginnings; second, it is unaware that in starting in an abstraction its conclusion must also be abstract; at this point, however, it is an abstraction not only from man's empirical reality but from his essential reality, the future communist society. To put it in terms of Marx's positive discoveries, philosophy is defective because it misunderstands the importance of productivity, history, and nature.

Having sought to explain the defect not of one particular philosophy but of all philosophy as such, Marx begins the radical assault on philosophy which ends in the call for its wholesale destruction. Marx's attack marks the first serious defeat for philosophy, for it necessarily begins to crumble only when philosophers themselves come to question it not in order to correct its past mistakes but to eliminate it altogether. Ironically, as in all such challenges, Marx's attack is based on the very standards that philosophy has itself developed and made important, the standards of reason and truth. Thus the destruction of philosophy is necessary, according to Marx, because its fundamental claim to seek the truth has been refuted. Philosophers are not disinterested, impartial seekers of the truth; rather they are products of their society, unavoidably entangled in forces and interests which they remain unaware of and over which they have no control. Yet there is an important difference between Marx and all later philosophical critics of philosophy: according to Marx, philosophy is abolished not only because of the discovery of its inherent limitations, but also because of its ultimate success, for having gained absolute knowledge, philosophy is complete and therefore comes to a final and fitting end.

Like all philosophers, Marx begins with certain assumptions, but he

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64 "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)," p. 304.
claims that, unlike other philosophers, he is fully conscious of what his assumptions are. In the beginning of the German Ideology, he succinctly states the initial insight which is the basis of his entire philosophy.

He says there that "the first premise of all human existence, and hence of all history, (is) the premise ... that men must be able to live in order to be able 'to make history'" and that since "life involves above all eating and drinking, shelter, clothing, and many other things ... the first historical act thus is the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself."65

What Marx is saying, in effect, is that the premise or assumption which he begins with is really not a premise or assumption at all; certainly it is not the kind of assumption with which other philosophers have begun, for it is transparent, commonsensical, and obvious to all: man must first be alive "in order to make history."66 Yet Marx is very misleading here, for what he means by life, production, and history is something which is not obvious, namely, that through production man creates his own life, and that history is the necessary process of this self-creation. Marx believes that his speculative conclusions must inevitably follow from his simple commonsense premises. What he fails to see, however, is that his simple premises already contain, or are already the result of, a prior philosophical interpretation, for it is by no means clear that because man is materially productive, he creates himself, completely overcomes nature, and establishes a universal, classless, laborless society. Contained within Marx's seemingly commonsense premises, therefore, is the germ of his own idealism, which sees in history the absolute emancipation of man and sees in man the absolute overcoming of nature.

Marx's critique of philosophy is powerful and telling as he discovers and delineates philosophy's underlying assumptions. The overestimation of thought in the realm of human affairs is a perennial problem that the philosopher must always face. Yet an equal danger lies in an underestimation of reason, especially when it arises through a method of debunking which seeks to explain the rational by the non-rational. This is clearly the danger that Marx succumbs to. Yet he does this in a peculiarly complex and elusive way, for underneath his critique of reason lies a faith in reason as strong and pervasive as the faith he criticized in the other philosophers of whom he was so contemptuous. What else could account for the fact that Marx believed that history developed according to definite laws which would finally lead to the creation of a universal society where all men would be completely free? What does the union of theory and practice mean, if not that reason should rule the world? Marx wanted to liberate man through a critique of philosophy which would sweep away all ideological

65 "The German Ideology," p. 419.
66 Ibid.
obstacles to material development, for the rationality necessary for liberation was to be found not in thought or consciousness but in pure production. But in his haste to liberate man, he overlooked the genuine obstacles to liberation of which earlier philosophers were more fully aware. Marx’s critique of philosophy remains incomplete because of this oversight, and because he failed to appreciate the extent to which he incorporated the tradition that he criticized and rejected.
WINSTON CHURCHILL ON EMPIRE AND THE LIMITS OF POLITICS

Kirk Emmert

From the beginning of his political career Winston Churchill was an admirer and advocate of empire. His opposition to what he derisively called "Little Englandism" was balanced, however, by his rejection of the views of "our unbridled Imperialists, who have no thought but to pile up armaments, taxation, and territory." Churchill, who considered himself to be a "middle thinker," advocated a mean between an isolationist, inward-looking nation and the expansive, assertive nation favored by the imperialists. In May, 1903 he told a crowd at Hoxton that "the policy which the Unionist Party ought to pursue must be a policy of Imperialism, but not of one-sided Imperialism. It must not be a policy which looks only abroad or only at home. . . . The farseeing eye of Lord Beaconsfield ranged widely across the waters to the most distant colonies and possessions of the Crown, but at the same time he was able to see first and foremost in his mind the virtue and prosperity of the people of Great Britain."

Churchill's desire to find a moral foundation for a restrained imperial policy which would support the virtue of the British people led him to be a proponent of civilizing empire, of empire as a means of promoting the moral and political virtue of both the imperial ruler and the uncivilized ruled. Ultimately, however, he saw that even a civilizing empire would be in a sense unlimited and that the true grounds of moderate empire lie in the recognition that the cultivation of moral and political virtue is not man's highest end. Churchill's advocacy of limited empire reflected his awareness of the limits of even the most glorious public life.

The Causes of the River War

Both those who sought simply to increase British power and those who were moved by religious and philanthropic sentiments were, Churchill thought, the proponents of immoderate imperialism. The

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4 Quoted in Churchill, Churchill, 2:56.
latter, high-minded imperialists were particularly influential in promoting the reconquest of the Sudan described by Churchill in his book *The River War*. The death of General Charles Gordon, "at the hands of infidel savages, transformed him into something like a martyr. There was an earnest desire on the part of a pious nation to dissociate his name from failure." This desire, under the impetus of the religious fervor excited by the death of "the Christian hero," was transformed into a desire for revenge:

The idea of revenge, ever attractive to the human heart, appeared to receive the consecration of religion. What community is altogether free from fanaticism? The spirit of the Crusades stirred beneath the surface of scientific civilisation; and as the years passed by, there continued in England a strong undercurrent of public opinion which ran in the direction of "a holy war."  

Churchill disapproved of this "indulgence of the sentiment known as 'the avenging of Gordon'" because he thought that revenge was not "a dignified emotion for a great people to display": the tendency of religious sentiments to encourage fanaticism made them an inadequate foundation for empire.

Philanthropic sentiments also lead to excess. The "misery of the Dervish dominions appealed," Churchill observed, "to that great volume of generous humanitarian feeling which sways our civilized State." Humanitarian sentiments often give rise, however, to moral indignation, which is by its very nature immoderate. Keenly aware of the great distance between himself and the lowly masses, and sanguine concerning the possibilities for their improvement, the humanitarian often becomes impatient with the intractability of their condition. As he becomes aware of their indifference to his selfless ministrations, the philanthropist directs more and more of his mounting indignation at the very people he sought to benefit. Many of those who were at first pitied in their misery are soon detested for being "vile." The sentiment grows for punishing "the wickedness" of the worst of these "vile" savages, who, it seems, are somehow responsible for the degradation and hostility of the rest. Some of the excesses committed by the empire could be traced, Churchill suggested, to the philanthropists who could not contemplate military operations ... unless they ... [could] cajole themselves into the belief that their enemy are utterly and hopelessly vile. To this end the Dervishes ... have been loaded with every variety of abuse and charged with all conceivable crimes. This may be very comfortable to philanthropic persons at home; but when an army in the field becomes imbued with the idea that the enemy are vermin who cumber the earth, instances of barbarity may very easily

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6 Ibid., 2:388, 393.
be the outcome. This unmeasured condemnation is moreover as unjust as it is dangerous and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{7}

Churchill distrusted policies rooted in righteous indignation because they have the common "fault . . . that they carry men too far and lead to reactions. Militarism degenerates into brutality. Loyalty promotes tyranny and sycophancy. Humanitarianism becomes maudlin and ridiculous. Patriotism shades into cant. Imperialism sinks into Jingoism."\textsuperscript{8}

The desire for power is probably the most common cause of expansive, jingoistic imperialism. Churchill observed: "all the vigorous nations of the earth have sought and are seeking to conquer." Modern European civilization is "more powerful, more glorious, but no less aggressive" than were those of Rome or Islam: it was the "impulse of conquest which hurried the French and the British to Canada and the Indies." The spirit of empire, the passion that moves it forward, is "the desire for power . . ., the desire to prevail, . . . a great fact which practical men must reckon with."\textsuperscript{9} It was this desire for conquest that was often behind the constant struggle for empire which Churchill called the "perpetual inheritance of our race."\textsuperscript{10} Man "has never sought tranquility alone. His nature drives him forward to fortunes which, for better or worse, are different from those which it is in his power to pause and enjoy."\textsuperscript{11} Rather than inclining men to moderation, limited aspirations, and contentment, nature tends to push man to seek predominance, and it pushes the political community in the direction of unbounded expansion. The desire for power is, however, an inadequate foundation for empire because it encourages unlimited expansion and provides no basis for distinguishing between just and tyrannical empire.

Although he did not consider philanthropic or religious sentiments or the unrestrained desire for power justifiable causes of the River War, Churchill did support the reconquest of the Sudan. He argued that the River War was fundamentally wise and right because it was to the advantage of Great Britain. In defending his political approach to the war, he recorded his own mild protest against the vindictive and implacable spirit with which the Dervishes are regarded in certain quarters. . . . It is hypocritical to say that it [the war] was waged to chastise the wickedness of the Dervishes. It is wrong to declare that it was fought to avenge General Gordon. The quarrel was clear. Certain savage men had invaded the Egyptian territories, had killed their inhabitants and their

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 394.


guardians, and had possessed themselves of the land. In due course it became
convenient, as well as desirable, to expel these intruders and reoccupy these ter-
ritories. The Khedive enjoys his own again by proxy. The Dervishes are slain or
scattered. They lived by the sword. Why should they not perish by the magazine
rifle?12

The war strengthened England's grasp upon Egypt, a connection which
was, as was that with India, a source of strength for Britain. Apart
from any connection with Egypt, Churchill pointed out, Britain
"gained a vast territory which, although it would be easy to exaggerate
its value, is nevertheless coveted by every Great Power in Europe." Moreover, there England might develop "a trade which ... shall
exchange the manufactures of the Temperate Zone for the products of
the Tropic of Cancer ... [using] the north wind to drive civilisation and
prosperity to the south and the stream of the Nile to bear wealth and
commerce to the sea."13

Increased economic benefits for victor and vanguished, the expulsion
of a savage invader, the checking of rival powers, and the strengthening
of a civilizing empire were the political causes which, in Churchill's
view, justified the River War.14 It was particularly significant to
Churchill that this war was fought to promote the cause of civilization:
as a result of it, he noted, "a state of society which had long become an
anachronism—an insult as well as a danger to civilisation," a state of
society which, "even if it were tolerable to those whom it comprised,
was an annoyance to civilised nations," had been destroyed.15 The
highest interest of Britain was the defense and promotion of civiliza-
tion. Concern with prosperity, security, and civilization, including the
maintenance of British honor, were, in his view, the legitimate reasons
for Britain's return to the Sudan. To what extent, then, do these
concerns provide the foundation for the limited empire—limited both
in physical extent and in its governance of its subjects—which Chur-
chill desired for Britain?

Wealth and Security

Churchill was convinced that the economic health of twentieth-
century Britain depended on the maintenance of her empire. If "we
were to try to live by ourselves alone," he argued, "there would be the
most frightful crash and obliteration of life which has ever darkened
human records. ... Now that we have got this immense population here
at this level of economic society, it is too late to go back to primitive
and pastoral conditions. We must be a strong, successful, scientific,
commercial empire or starve. There is no half-way house for Britain between greatness and ruin."16 The empire provided Britain with access to raw materials and to markets for her finished goods. "From these vast plantations," Churchill observed of the British possessions in East and West Africa, "will be drawn the raw materials of many of our most important industries; to them will flow a continuous and broadening train of British products."17 Economic needs can give impetus to imperial ambitions, but Churchill thought that they also served, or could be made to serve, as a brake upon those ambitions, for "imperialism and economics clash as often as honesty and self-interest."18 The British "Forward Policy" on the Indian frontier was bad economics, he thought: "Regarded from an economic standpoint, the trade of the frontier valleys, will never pay a shilling in the pound on the military expenditure necessary to preserve order."19 He called for following the "old and honoured principle, 'Pay as you go'" because he knew that the Indian empire could not finance further expansion. There should be no thought of a "machiavellian" policy, he observed, until the Indian granaries and treasury were full.20 Only military measures "necessary for the safety of our possessions"21 should "stand against deficits. A bankrupt and struggling business may insure its premises, but it is not justified in ostentatiously enlarging them."22

However effective it might be in certain particular circumstances, Churchill knew that economics could not adequately restrain modern empire. A few lands are as barren as the Indian frontier, but in many areas the likely prospect of industrialization, expanded commerce, and abundant natural resources encourages imperial expansion as a benefit to both ruler and ruled. And however limited the resources of the Indian empire, modern technology and industrialization, both of which Churchill considered to be essential parts of the imperial project, expand the wealth of a great empire to the point where it seems that resources are always available for brief expansionary wars. Churchill was aware, moreover, that economic concerns often encourage rather than restrain imperial expansion. Because of the ineffectiveness of economic restraints on expansion, he stressed that empire should be understood primarily as the outgrowth of a concern for security and, at a higher level, for civilization.

18 Churchill, Malakand, p. 220.
19 Ibid., p. 309.
21 Churchill, Malakand, p. 270.
In Churchill's view, it was the need for security from powerful and expansionist France and Spain that led England in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to augment her fleet, which, in turn, encouraged English traders and colonists to establish themselves in foreign lands. Desire for greater security and prosperity often caused these colonists and commercial men to expand their control over adjacent foreign territory. The larger their domain, the more frequently the need for military security seemed to dictate the absorption of new territory, including key points on the trade route back to Britain.23 Repeatedly, expansion resulted from attempts to be more secure: Churchill considered the need to counter French intrigues in the Sudan one of the legitimate reasons for undertaking the River War.24 In The Story of the Malakand Field Force, he shows that the original attacks of the savage tribes on the imperial forces was a consequence of the British "Forward Policy," which, in turn, was aimed at thwarting the designs of Russia on Afghanistan.25 "I am inclined to think," he observed to his mother, "that the rulers of India, ten years ago or a hundred years ago, were as much the sport of circumstances as their successors are to-day. . . . The force of circumstances on the Indian frontier is beyond human control."26

Five months after he published his account of the Malakand Field Force, Churchill predicted that necessity would soon impel, and thereby justify, British absorption of Afghanistan:

We can neither retire nor for ever stand still. The whole weight of expert evidence is massed. . . . It is too late to turn back. The weary march of civilization and empire lies onward. We must follow it till the Afghan border is reached and thence beyond, until ultimately India is divided from Russia only by a line of painted sign-pots, and by the fact that to transgress that line is war.27

"We are not a young people with a scanty inheritance," Churchill noted in an Admiralty memorandum in December, 1913: "We have engrossed to ourselves, in times when other powerful nations were paralysed by barbarism or internal war, an immense share of the wealth and traffic of the world. We have got all we want in territory, and our claim to be left in the unmolested enjoyment of vast and splendid possessions, often seems less reasonable to others than to us."28

By the first decade of this century Britain would have been willing to rule alone in moderation, but other great powers envied and feared

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the British and desired supremacy themselves. The Germans, in particular, he said, asked whether England was to "enjoy the dominance of the world and of the oceans," whether Germany was to be denied its "place in the sun." The Germans said, "We are late, but we are going to have our share. Lay a place at the table for the German empire . . . or . . . we will thrust you from your seats and carve the joint ourselves!"

The empire, then, could not rest and enjoy its plenitude. If it did not resist the encroachments of other Great Powers, thereby increasing the likelihood of war and further expansion, it could only sit back and watch its prestige decline and, in time, lose its possessions. Because of the inevitable threats to its security, a defensive, satisfied empire becomes practically indistinguishable from a deliberately expansive, aggressive empire. The compulsion of circumstances seems to impel empire to a course of unending and unlimited expansion.

Churchill did not see any acceptable way to break the link between national expansion and the requirements of military security. He thought some restraint could be found in a strict view of military necessity, but he was aware that this would at best retard, not prevent, expansion. To attempt to find security by remaining small and weak, a situation which would require a diplomacy of shifts and maneuvers from "which pride and virtue alike recoil," was not an option available to Britain. It was, in any case, undesirable, in Churchill's view, because it denied a vigorous people the possibility of attaining that level of human excellence reached only by the exercise of demanding political tasks. A vigorous people tend, moreover, to equate greatness with power and predominance: their professed need for security often masks a strong desire for power. In order to resist this desire, a vigorous nation needs a higher political motivation. Churchill argued that the promotion of civilization ought to be this higher and more moderate purpose. In his notion of civilizing empire, he thought he had found a mean between jingoism and isolationism.

Civilizing Empire

Churchill's defense of civilizing empire is grounded on his assumption that all men are under a sovereign obligation to realize their varying potentials for moral and political virtue. He did not think it was
sufficient to do well or to be satisfied with results which are good enough to justify the means used to attain them: perfection, he believed, must remain the human ideal.  

"What is the use of living," Churchill asked his audience during a speech at Kinnaird in October, 1908, "if it be not to strive for noble causes . . .? How else can we put ourselves in harmonious relation with the great verities and consolations of the infinite and the eternal?"  

If the reader of The River War should inquire "to what end the negroes should labour that they may improve; why they should not remain contended if degraded; and wherefore they should be made to toil to better things up so painful a road, I confess I cannot answer him. If, however, he proves that there is no such obligation he will have made out a very good case for universal suicide."  

But why do the uncivilized need the external assistance of empire to fulfill their "obligation" to improve? Churchill recognized that civilization cannot be simply or directly bestowed by one people on another. Men must toil up a "painful" road, and with time and luck some peoples can raise themselves out of barbarism, but the ignorance of the uncivilized and their natural preference for unrestrained freedom over the rigors of self-improvement often prevents them from becoming civilized through their own efforts.  

Churchill found that on the Indian frontier "the war-like nature of the people and their hatred of central control arrest the further progress of development." Even under the relatively auspicious circumstances in the Sudan, guidance from an imperial power was necessary to assure the improvement of the uncivilized: "The Arabs of the Soudan were not wholly irreclaimable, and they may under happier circumstances and with tolerant guidance develop into a vigorous and law-abiding community." Churchill did not exclude the possibility that "in the passage of years the Arabs might indeed have worked out their own salvation, as have the nations of Europe. The army, become effete, would wither and disappear. . . . A wise ruler might arise who should establish a more equitable and progressive polity. The natural course of development is long, but true."  

However, the time required and the likelihood that the necessary conjunction of favorable circumstances would not come about, or would be interrupted if it did, led him to reject it as a viable alternative to imperial rule. The overriding importance of man's obligation to civilize himself requires that he submit, when it is available, to the more rapid and assured agency of imperial rule.

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34 Ibid., 2:189.  
37 Ibid., p. 398; ibid., 1:18–19, 190.  
38 Churchill, Malakand, pp. 6–7.  
40 Ibid., 1:113.
The civilized rule despotically over the uncivilized, but although they are not limited by the need to obtain the formal consent of their subjects, they are restrained. "Intrinsic merit is the only title of a dominant race to its possessions" because only the rule of those of superior merit can have a civilizing effect on the ruled. Churchill's view of the proper scope of the political sphere in a subject nation provided further limits on the imperial power. He thought that the imperial government ought to play a very minimal role in native education; he was not enthusiastic about missionary activity; and he thought that the imperial government should abstain from involvement in religious matters and should tolerate all religions which were not simply barbaric.

Given these limits, how was the empire to promote civilization? Churchill thought that since most men find it "painful" to toil and do not have a strong inclination to self-improvement, they require some immediate incentive to work. This incentive is found in man's needs for security, food, and minimal comfort, needs which usually cannot be met unless he exerts himself. The willingness of man to labor, and thereby to do that which is a precondition for his improvement, depends on the scale and intensity of his needs and on the availability of resources to meet those needs. Man is in a condition conducive to his improvement when he is dissatisfied, when he wants things he does not have. Natural scarcity forces men to toil, but scarcity also limits improvement because the resources are not available to enable man to cultivate his higher faculties. Empire improves upon this natural condition by expanding man's desires and by providing (assuming a willingness to toil) the means to satisfy these "more numerous wants of civilization." Promotion of economic development and commerce, along with the establishment of law, order, and fair administration, were the tools which Churchill thought empire should use to civilize its subjects. His conviction that empire would elevate the uncivilized was based on his willingness to embrace the spirit and practices of "these busy, practical, matter-of-fact, modern times, where nothing is desirable unless economically sound." Scientific technology and large capital projects such as dams and railways are indispensable to the

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42 Churchill, Malakand, p. 298.
46 Ibid., 2:398–99.
47 Churchill, Malakand, p. 122.
48 Churchill's main concern in the final chapter of My African Journey is indicated by its title, "The Victoria and Albert Railway." He concluded The River War by "touching on [for seven pages] the tremendous schemes of irrigation which lie in the future" (2:406). These were the schemes which captured Churchill's imagination and on which he set great store for the future of the empire in Africa.
establishment and governing of the empire of a great civilizing power.49

Empire would not be just if it did not benefit the ruled, but Churchill’s commitment to empire derived mainly from his view that imperial rule elevates the civilized ruler. He did not accept the view that the uncivilized have a universal right to assistance from the civilized, or that civilized men and nations should be guided by a moral obligation to aid the less developed. The ascent from barbarism to full civilization did not, in his view, entail a movement from the depths of narrow self-seeking to the peaks of selfless altruism: rather, he thought that a proper view of morality was closer to the one extreme, calculation in one’s own interest, than to the other philanthropic altruism. A sound morality takes account of the enduring character of human selfishness, of the “primary desire of man to seek his own benefit,”50 while also obliging men to restrain themselves from injustice and unprincipled self-seeking:

Reasonable care for a man’s interest is neither a public nor a private vice. It is affectation to pretend that statesmen and soldiers who have gained fame in history have been indifferent to their own advancement, incapable of resenting injuries, or guided in their public action only by altruism. It is when self-interest outweighs all other interests in a man’s soul, that the censures of history are rightly applied.

The moral foundation of empire, and thus also of civilization, rests not on the distinction between duty and interests or rights, but on the distinction between narrow, “slavish,” or excessive self-interest and the pursuit of one’s own interest broadly or nobly conceived.51 The civilized man, the man of noble self-regard, wants the best things for himself, and he considers moral and political virtue to be the things most worth having. The consequence of his struggle is that he benefits others who, in the absence of his efforts, have no claim to the benefits they receive. “It is admitted,” Churchill noted of certain traitors, “that they deserve to be shot. The question is not, however, what suits them, but what suits us.”52 The moral obligation of civilized men and nations does not flow down, to the uncivilized, or across, to their fellow men, but up, to fully civilized man—to civilization.

For Churchill, human excellence was largely equivalent to political excellence, that is, to the moral and political virtues needed to govern the political community. The most highly praised men in his essays on great contemporaries spent years in positions of political and, secondarily, military leadership. Their excellence resided above all in their posses-

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sion of the qualities needed for statesmanship. High public office was, conversely, what enabled them to develop their potential. Man develops his intelligence by reasoning, his rhetorical powers by speaking, and a high level of moral virtue by acting justly, courageously, or moderately. Moral virtues can be developed only in situations which call for them or give them scope: men need a stage on which their gifts can be developed and displayed.\textsuperscript{53} Without the need to give someone his due there can be no development of justice; without a substantial danger, no courage; without political responsibilities, no prudence.

In a letter to his mother, written when he was a subaltern in India, Churchill expressed his eagerness to find a more demanding position, one big enough "to hold me." Somewhat later, on his way up the Nile to Khartoum, he wrote that he would come back "the wiser and stronger" for the experience and then think of "wider spheres" of action. Political life was that wider sphere. The first time that he stood for Parliament from Oldham (in 1899) he observed: "At each meeting I am conscious of growing powers—and facilities of speech—and it is in this that I shall find my consolation should the result be—as is probable—unfortunate."\textsuperscript{54} Churchill went from sport to war to politics, activities which he ranked according to the comprehensiveness of the demands they made upon him. In his reflections on his own life he indicates that ruling a civilizing empire is the culmination of the search which men must undertake to find scope for, and thereby to develop, their powers.

Granting that the seeking and exercise of political responsibilities is required to attain individual excellence, why, particularly in a democratic regime which provides numerous opportunities for political participation, must a nation be imperial in order to provide the fullest encouragement to virtue? Churchill thought that, because of its widespread responsibilities for governing others, it can provide a greater number of more authoritative posts than a non-imperial nation and, in particular, more than a modern democratic nation which has a relatively weak administration and tends to elevate private over public affairs. To have confined the British at home would have been to stifle their unusual potential for excellence, but within the broader empire "the peculiar gifts for administration and high civic virtue of our race may find a healthy and honourable scope."\textsuperscript{55}

Because of the greater authority of the imperial government in its possessions and the inevitable shortage of trained men to do the work of governing, each imperial officer and administrator, and particularly


the younger men, had greater responsibilities than they would have in similar pursuits at home. Reflecting on his trip through East Africa, Churchill noted, "the African protectorates now administered by the Colonial Office afford rare scope for the abilities of earnest and intelligent youth. A man of twenty-five may easily find himself ruling a large tract of country and a numerous population." He found, for instance, that
two young white officers—a civilian and a soldier—preside from this centre of authority [the office of the District Commissioner], far from the telegraph, over the peace and order of an area as large as an English county, and regulate the conduct and fortunes of some seventy-five thousand natives, who have never previously known or acknowledged any law but violence or terror. ... The Government is too newly established to have developed the highly centralized and closely knit—perhaps too closely knit—hierarchy and control of the Indian system. It is far too poor to afford a complete Administration. The District Commissioner must judge for himself and be judged upon his actions. Very often ... the officer is not a District Commissioner at all, but a junior acting in his stead, sometimes for a year or more. To him there come day by day the natives of the district with all their troubles, disputes, and intrigues. Their growing appreciation of the impartial justice of the tribunal leads them increasingly to carry all sorts of cases to the District Commissioner's Court. When they are ill they come and ask for medicine. ... Disease and accident have to be combated without professional skill. Courts of justice and forms of legality must be maintained without lawyers. Taxes have to be kept with only a shadow of force. All these great opportunities of high service, and many others, are often and daily placed within the reach of men in their twenties—on the whole with admirable results.56

In Egypt, squadron officers had greater power than the colonel of an English regiment.57 Service in a native army offered far more early opportunities, Churchill noted, than did service in the regular British army: "The subaltern almost immediately after joining finds himself in command of two companies ... The young white officers ... of the Native Army are more resourceful and more intelligent, better fitted to lead men in war, than their comrades in the British army. ... Responsibility has made the difference. ... What greater educating force is there in the world?"58

At the peak of affairs in each possession was the equivalent of Lord Cromer, who in 1899 had been in Egypt for almost sixteen years:

His status was indefinite; he might be nothing; he is in fact everything. His word was law. Working through a handful of brilliant Lieutenants ... Cromer controlled with minute and patient care every department of the Egyptian administration and every aspect of policy. British and Egyptian Governments had come and gone; he had seen the Soudan lost and reconquered. He had

56 Ibid., pp. 23–25.
maintained a tight hold upon the purse string and a deft control of the whole movement of Egyptian politics.\(^{59}\)

In addition to increasing the opportunities for citizens to fill positions with important military and political responsibilities, the acquisition of an empire augments the scope of the major offices in the home government of the imperial nation. Churchill held that there is a direct relation between the goodness or excellence of political and moral virtues and their magnitude: the most praiseworthy virtue is that which exists on the grandest scale. When he advised his mother to name the periodical she was establishing the "Imperial Magazine," rather than the "Anglo Saxon," he told her that there was "a sort of idea of excellence about it—an Imperial pint is bigger than an ordinary pint."\(^{60}\) Just as "magnitude lends a certain grandeur to crime,"\(^{61}\) it adds grandeur and nobility to virtue. Other things being equal, much greater powers are called forth to govern properly seventy-five million than to govern seventy-five thousand. The highest possibilities for statesmanship exist for those who "hold with honour the foremost stations in the greatest storms."\(^{62}\) Clearly, the head of a nation with world-wide imperial possessions holds such a station. Only at the head of an extensive empire can the truly great-souled man, the "surpreme combination of the King-Warrior-Statesman,"\(^{63}\) have his day.

The British empire did more, however, than provide scope for development of the gifts of the British nation. By stressing the importance of the civic virtues, it helped to make a capacity for them, and an eagerness to develop them, a kind of second nature of the British. In an unpublished short story written in 1898 (which contrasted the struggles of the poor in an East End slum to deal with an increase in the price of bread with the attempt of an owner of a great American trust to corner the wheat market) Churchill indicated the significance of the kinds of "outlets" which a community provides for those of talent and ambition:\(^{64}\)

His was not a character that turned to the pursuit of pleasure. All the energy of his vigorous father had descended to him. Unformulated ambitions impelled him to work. No "sweated" labourer in his factories worked harder than did this master of millions. In other older lands he might have devoted the great talents he possessed to the service of the nation. He might have been a general or he might have been a statesman. But the American millionaire has no such outlets for his ambitions. . . . He cannot condescend to the army. . . . Still less will such colossi mingle in public life. . . . So there had been only one outlet for

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\(^{61}\) Churchill, *The River War, 1:29.*


his tremendous energies—money making. And to money making he turned with unflagging assiduity and unparalleled success.

Thus empire does more than develop potential whose direction is preordained or satisfy aspirations of the predominant human type in the nation. By requiring that certain tasks be done, empire calls forth certain virtues and, thereby, a specific kind of human being. The possession of an empire inclines a nation to admire a certain kind of man; an empire directs, in the broadest sense, the development of its ruling nation. In the peroration of a speech given on October 31, 1898, Churchill called for "young men who do not mind danger ... [and] older and perhaps wiser men who do not fear responsibility. The difficulties and emergencies with which the Empire is confronted will give us these men in plentiful abundance—and they in their turn will help to preserve the very Empire that calls them forth."\(^65\) Churchill loved the empire because it produced men like Sir Bindon Blood: "Thirty-seven years of soldiering, of war in many lands, of sport of every kind, have steeled alike muscle and nerve. Sir Bindon Blood ... is one of that type of soldiers and administrators, which the responsibilities and dangers of an Empire produce, a type, which has not been, perhaps, possessed by any nation except the British, since the days of the Senate and the Roman people sent their proconsuls to all parts of the world."\(^66\)

In addition to the empire's benefits to those relatively few who went abroad to protect and govern it or who held high office in the imperial government, Churchill thought that the citizens who remained at home were fortunate to be part of an imperial nation. The empire increased their security, improved their economic well-being, and allowed the poor to emigrate to a British colony in which they could improve their situation. The self-respect of the common man was increased by his recognition that he was a citizen of a nation that ruled "in majesty and tranquility by merit as well as by strength over the fairest and happiest regions of the world."\(^67\) His "pride in the broad crimson stretches of the map of the globe which marked the span of the British Empire"\(^68\) fortified his patriotism and gave a larger, more political meaning to his life, and he was further civilized by the general need for courage, perseverance, and restraint required by the nation's imperial position. Finally, since its continued existence required a high degree of moral and civic virtue from its foremost citizens, the empire gave its stamp of approval to these men and to the virtues they embodied. It thereby kept alive for the general citizenry a fuller view of human excellence than would have otherwise survived in a modern, democratic nation.

If the virtue of the pre-eminent statesman is the highest virtue achievable by man—if the life dedicated to political excellence is the

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The Limits of Politics

Is civilizing empire also limited and moderate empire? As a means or instrumentality for developing moral and political virtue, empire is limited by the end it serves: dishonorable and excessive actions are forbidden, and virtuous actions are demanded of it. To be true to its purpose, a civilizing empire must treat its subjects justly. The standard of civilization does not, however, in principle limit the extent of imperial expansion. Churchill’s two crucial assumptions—that the life dedicated to cultivating political excellence is the highest life and that the most complete virtue is that which makes possible actions on the grandest scale—encourage imperial expansion without limit. In practice, civilizing empire might be limited in extent by the power of rival nations, the lack of uncivilized peoples not already subject to imperial rule, or the establishment of world empire. Churchill seems to have been aware, however, of the need to find some other principle by which the expansive thrust implicit in his view of the nature and requirements of civilization could be controlled.

The civilizing empire which Churchill defended was also a “democratic Empire”; the British regime was an “Imperial Democracy.” Churchill saw that the democratic principles of the imperial regime exercised a restraint on expansion, for in an imperial democracy the democratic view of the relation between the public and the private tends to guide the imperial government abroad as well as at home. Churchill accepted the empire’s view of the narrow scope of the public sphere which kept it from widespread involvement in the morals, manners, and religion of the ruled, and the democratic commitment to improve the well-being of the lower classes at home increased resistance to diverting the nation’s energies and resources to foreign projects.

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Churchill was aware that a democratic regime could exert some salutary restraint on empire, but he seems to have been more interested in the connection between civilizing empire and a healthy democracy. A democratic and civilizing empire combines the democratic commitment to freedom and the imperial dedication to civilization or virtue. It does this by first establishing the supremacy of the democratic principle and then allowing for at least one institution within the democratic regime, the institution of empire, which is guided by a different view of man and of the purpose of the political order. Empire is the essentially undemocratic means by which democracy, while retaining its foundation in the equal rights of all, is pushed toward a concern for virtue. Empire is the means for elevating or giving a higher tone to democracy.

The instability of this marriage of opposites was brought home with great force to Churchill during his battle in the 1930's to prevent a devolution of power in India.72 Once they fully accepted democratic principles, both rulers and ruled became convinced that civilizing empire was basically unjust: the democratic principles of equality and freedom undermined the higher justification for empire. Modern mass democracy was revealed to be not the moderator but the opponent of civilizing empire. It was clear that the limits for civilizing empire could not be found in the contradictory principles of democratic freedom and equality but, as Churchill had seen many years earlier, in an awareness of the limits of all political endeavors.

In his political writings, Churchill repeatedly teaches the advisability, in an imperfect world, of moderating all aspirations and expectations for political reform.73 Political affairs are governed by a "mysterious law which perhaps in larger interests limits human achievement, and bars or saves the world from clear-cut solutions."

The earth "seems fatal to the noble aspirations of its peoples. ... The best efforts of men, however glorious their early results, have dismal endings; like plants which shoot and bud and put forth beautiful flowers, and then grow rank and coarse and are withered by the winter."75 In war, for instance, "high comradeship and glorious daring" give way to "disillusion and prostration."76 Even the greatest victory leads inevitably to "weakness, discontent, faction and disappointment."77 Churchill took particular care to depreciate any political utopianism that might be associated with the aspiration for empire:

What enterprise that an enlightened community may attempt is more noble and more profitable than the reclamation from barbarism of fertile regions and

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72 See Churchill, India.
77 Ibid., 4:10.
large populations? To give peace to warring tribes, to administer justice where all was violence, to strike the chains off the slave, to draw the richness from the soil, to plant the earliest seeds of commerce and learning... what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort? The act is virtuous, the exercise invigorating, and the result often extremely profitable.

The noble imperial aspiration is not, however, fully realizable and more often than not is corrupted beyond recognition:

As the mind turns from the wonderful cloudland of aspiration to the ugly scaffolding of attempt and achievement, a succession of opposite ideas arise. Industrious races are displayed stinted and starved for the sake of an expensive Imperialism which they can only enjoy, if they are well fed. Wild peoples, ignorant of their barbarism, callous of suffering, careless of life but tenacious of liberty, are seen to resist with fury the philanthropic invaders, and to perish in thousands before they are convinced of their mistake. The inevitable gap between conquest and dominion becomes filled with the figures of the greedy trader, the inopportune missionary, the ambitious soldier, and the lying speculator... And as the eye of thought rests on these sinister features, it hardly seems possible for us to believe that any fair prospect is approached by so foul a path.78

And when on occasion a nation such as the British did avoid this degrading corruption of its aspirations, its accomplishments were inevitably transitory. It was precisely its success which made Churchill fear for the future of the empire, for all great empires had been destroyed by it, and none had enjoyed such triumphs as the British.79

In The River War Churchill stresses the overwhelming power that modern scientific technology puts at the disposal of civilized empire.80 Modern civilized empire depends on the conquest of nature by scientific technology:81 had it not been for science, the civilization of modern Europe might have fallen to the uncivilized, like that of ancient Rome.82 In modern civilization there is a coincidence of superior power and superior virtue; it is a civilization particularly fit to make its way in the world.

Churchill acknowledges civilization's debt to scientific technology, but he is careful to express reservations about the whole scientific project and to caution against the sense of human omnipotence which accompanies the successful conquest of nature. He suggests the need to arrest the development and direct the employment of "the unexpected powers which the science of man has snatched from nature."83 Moreover, despite its aspirations, scientific civilization is ephemeral. In the early chapters of The River War, Churchill compares mutable political and human affairs with unchanging nature, and particularly with the Nile. He contrasts the "arrogance of science" which seeks to

79 Ibid., 2:237.
81 Churchill, My African Journey, pp. 70, 111.
82 Churchill, The River War, 2:250.
83 Ibid., 1:20.
Churchill on Empire and Limits of Politics

conquer the Nile with the "feeling of mystic reverence" which he associates with drinking these "soft yet fateful waters":

Emir and Dervish, officer and soldier, friend and foe, kneel alike to this god of ancient Egypt. ... The great river has befriended all races and every age. It has borne with impartial smile the stately barges of the Pharaohs and the unpretentious sternwheel steamers of Cook. ... Kingdoms and dominations have risen and fallen by its banks. Religious sects have sprung into life, gained strength in adversity, triumphed over opposition, and relapsed into the obscurity of non-existence. The knowledge of men has grown, withered, and revived. The very shape and structure of the human form may have altered, but the Nile remains unchanged.84

Observing the battlefield at Omdurman several days after the great battle in which the Dervish empire was destroyed, Churchill concluded that the fate of the fallen Dervishes presaged that of their conquerors:

They were confident in their strength, in the justice of their cause, in the support of their religion. Now only the heaps of corruption in the plain, and the fugitives dispersed and scattered in the wilderness, remained. The terrible machinery of scientific war had done its work. The Dervish host was scattered and destroyed. Their end, however, only anticipates that of the victors; for Time, which laughs at science, as science laughs at valour, will in due course contemptuously brush both combatants away.85

The power and beauty of the unchanging Nile led Churchill to reflect on the insignificance of man, but man resists the notion that he is unimportant; he wishes to live beyond his lifetime in this world. Political men "long for a refuge in memory, when the world shall have slipped from beneath their feet like a trapdoor," through deeds so great as to be remembered by all subsequent generations. In The River War Churchill directly rejects the view that the glory that men and nations obtain for their political deeds can somehow be eternal, suggesting that even the greatest accomplishments are soon forgotten, for the few men who seek glory for themselves tend to concentrate on the present, and most men are indifferent to greatness, particularly to the greatness which existed in other times:

The past in relation to the present is but a fleeting moment; nor is it to be expected that when others occupy the world, the events I have chronicled will attract their attention. Each generation exults in the immediate possession of life, and regards with indifference, scarcely tinged by pride or pity, the records and monuments of those that are no more. The greatest events of history are insignificant beside the bill of fare. The greatest men that ever lived serve to pass an idle hour. The tremendous crash of the Roman Empire is scarcely heard outside the schools and colleges. The past is insulted as much by what is remembered as by what is altogether forgotten.86

Through his depreciation of the possibilities for eternal glory, his observations on the transitory and imperfect nature of all political

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84 Ibid., pp. 10, 8-9.
85 Ibid., 2:226.
86 Ibid., 1:9, 11.
The failure to stress a connection between civilizing empire and the pursuit of glory, Churchill sought to moderate the aspiration for greatness which is the ultimate cause of such an empire. His depreciation of political things in the light of a more enduring natural order was intended to have the same effect. The question remains, however, as to what kind of life should be pursued by the best men. However flawed, if political accomplishments are the highest achievements open to man, the best men ought to and will commit themselves wholeheartedly to grand political projects. It seems that moderate and limited empire can be reconciled with a commitment to human excellence or to civilization only if political and moral virtue is not seen as the highest form of human attainment. There must be a way of life equal or superior to the political life if there are to be solid grounds for limiting the expansion of the political community and for taking a sufficiently detached attitude toward all political endeavors. In his early and only novel, *Savrola*, and later in his essay on painting, Churchill explicitly calls into question the superiority of political accomplishments and suggests, thereby, the highest grounds for establishing the limits of empire.

*Savrola* was the leader of a movement to overthrow the dictator of the republic of Laurania. Churchill describes him as a “public man” driven by ambition. His temperament was “vehement, high and daring”; he was one of those “whose spirits are so wrought that they know rest only in action, contentment only in danger, and in confusion find their only peace.” *Savrola* was not, however, simply a man of action. In contrast to his friend Moret, the man of action incarnate, whose exaggerated and passionate nature caused him to live “always . . . in the superlative,” Savrola had a “counterpoise of healthy cynicism.” His stoical philosophy was the basis for his detachment: he had not fixed his “thoughts on the struggles and hopes of the world.” And there was a private side to Savrola’s life: Churchill described his room as being “the chamber of a philosopher, but of no frigid, academic recluse; it was the chamber of a man, a human man, who appreciated all earthly pleasures, appraised them at their worth, enjoyed, and despised them.” On the roof of his house he had an observatory from which “he loved to watch the stars for the sake of their mysteries.” He frequently came under “the power of the spell that stargazing exercises on curious, inquiring humanity,” a dream of “another world, a world more beautiful, a world of boundless possibilities.” He could appreciate a life devoted to the search for beauty and even saw that such a life was more perfect than his own active one: “To live in dreamy quiet and philosophic calm in some beautiful garden, far from the noise of men and with every diversion that art and intellect could

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suggest, was, he felt, a more agreeable picture." But, however agreeable the alternative, a life of action was, he thought, the "only one he could ever live." 89

Savrola becomes more and more dissatisfied with politics. His life is "unsatisfactory; something was lacking. When all deductions had been made on the scores of ambition, duty, excitement, or fame, there remained an unabsorbed residuum of emptiness. What was the good of it all?" His disillusionment with politics increased when he saw that he, and the goals of moderation and justice which he represented, were going to be shunted aside by the revolutionary party as soon as he was no longer necessary for their victory. He had saved the people of Laurania from tyranny, but he found it impossible to "save them from themselves." Politics lost its excitement and charm; power had small attraction; all that remained was the duty to do what he could to save the revolution.

However, a second and perhaps more powerful source of Savrola's disillusionment was his love for Lucille, the wife of the slain dictator. In the course of his passion his ambition faded: "The object for which he had toiled so long was now nearly attained and it seemed of little comparative worth, that is to say, beside Lucille." Savrola and Lucille fled from Laurania, and we are left to wonder whether there was not some connection between his love for Lucille and his love for the pleasures of his observatory and for eternal beauty. "Honour," Savrola tells Lucille, "has no true foundation, no ultra-human sanction. Its codes are constantly changing with times and places," while true beauty is eternal. It conforms to "an eternal standard of fitness." Savrola ends with Gibbon's observation that history is "little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind." 90

In his essay on painting, first published in 1921, Churchill qualified his teaching in Savrola by suggesting that there are a number of ways of life which, if not superior, are at least equal to that devoted to politics. He found painting to be a new and fascinating amusement, but, on another level, he also found it to be a means of expressing "the old harmonies and symmetries in an entirely different language." Painting requires, and thus serves to develop, powers of observation and memory. 91 More generally, artistic achievement is essentially a manifestation of the artist's intellectual powers. The artist can produce "every effect of light and shade ...., of distance or nearness, simply by expressing justly the relations between ... different planes and surfaces." This ability was, Churchill thought, "founded upon a sense of proportion, trained no doubt by practice, but which in its essence is a

89 Ibid., pp. 31–34, 86.
90 Ibid., pp. 129, 229, 236, 233–34, 30, 78, 81, 241.
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frigid manifestation of mental power and size.” Painting a picture is like “fighting a battle” or “unfolding a long, sustained, interlocked argument.” A painting

is a proposition which, whether of few or numberless parts, is commanded by a single unity of conception. . . . Painting a great picture must require an intellect on the grand scale. There must be that all-embracing view which presents the beginning and the end, the whole and the part, as one instantaneous impression retentively and untiringly held in the mind. When we look at the large Turners . . ., we must feel in the presence of an intellectual manifestation the equal in quality and intensity of the finest achievement of warlike action, of forensic argument, or of scientific or philosophical adjudication.

The art of the painter reflects the harmonies which form the common core of the greatest human accomplishments in war, politics, art, and science. The “same mind’s eye that can justly survey and appraise and prescribe beforehand the values of a truly great picture in one . . . homogeneous comprehension, would also with a certain acquaintance with the special technique be able to pronounce with sureness upon any other high activity of the human intellect.”92

There are a number of activities open to man which demand a high degree of intellect but which do not take place in an imperial, or even a political, situation. The limits to the political life are established by the existence of other, at least equally elevated (or, as is suggested in Savrola, more elevated) human activities. Churchill’s impetus toward imperial expansion is thus restrained by his recognition that it is possible to become fully civilized in a non-imperial nation.

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92 Ibid., pp. 312, 309–10.
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE RIGHT TO REBELLION

Laurence Berns

This sort of legislation therefore may be good to look at, and might seem to be humane: he who hears about it receives it joyously, believing that there will be some kind of marvelous friendship of everyone for everyone; especially whenever anyone charges that the evils existing in politics now have come about because property is not common. I mean lawsuits with each other about contracts and judgments for false witness and flattery of the rich. It is not because of the absence of communism that these come to be, but because of wickedness. . . . Furthermore, it is just not only to speak of how many evils they will be deprived of by sharing in common, but also of how many goods. . . .

—Aristotle, Politics, II

Political philosophy concerns itself with the political fundamentals, the roots of political life. It raises the most radical questions about political life, e.g., what is the purpose of government? Different philosophers answer the question in different ways—in fact, they also raise it in different ways—but all philosophers, no matter how they raise and answer it, find themselves in a certain political predicament, which can be seen as follows: he who speculates about principles justifying all government is in that very act speculating about principles which could justify the alteration or abolition of any government that does not measure up to those principles. Or, in other words, every attempt to determine what the principles of political life and of government are leads to something like a doctrine of a right to revolution, or better, a right to rebellion.1

Let us take one of the clearest examples. Thomas Aquinas in his Treatise on Law2 argues that since law is for the sake of justice, the common good, an unjust law seems to be no law at all. Every human

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* Based on a talk at West Virginia Wesleyan College, November 21, 1969, prompted in part by questions raised in the St. John's College Student Forum meeting of October 15, 1969.

1 Cf. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Civil Government, xix. In Locke's perhaps more cautious language rebel always means aggressor. Anyone in civil society who uses "force without Right" does "Rebellare", i.e., bring back a state of war, and is thereby a rebel, be he subject or ruler. Locke does speak both of the right to resist a government whose enforcements violate the fundamental ends of government and of the right to erect a government or form of government to secure those ends. The right to rebellion, as we use it, comprehends both these rights.

law, Thomas argues, is binding only in so far as it is derived from the natural law, the law of reason, the moral law. To the extent to which it deviates from the natural law it is a perversion of law. Confronted by a tyrannical government, he who understands that such government violates the fundamental purpose of government becomes aware of a right to rebel or, as the Declaration of Independence puts it, in some cases a duty to alter or to abolish the oppressive government, a duty to rebel. The right to rebellion is a dramatic reminder that no government of men is as important as are the moral principles of good government.

But the doctrine of the right to rebellion is easily abused. Demagogues of all ages have been carried away by their own ambition to denounce, as unjust, laws and governments that stand in the way of their accession to political power. Idealists of all ages—in righteous but intemperate indignation—have allowed themselves to become the dupes of demagoguery, demagoguery that originates both inside and outside of themselves. Laws and governments, because they do and must restrain, in some ways are bound to go against the grain of every man who has some passion in his soul that needs restraining, against the grain of every man who is not only rational, who is not an angel,—in sum against the grain of every man. The more reasonable man faces an additional irritation, though one which he might be expected to understand, namely, being forced to live in accordance with restrictions framed for those less reasonable than himself. Demagogues work on those abraded passions and, by wrongheaded appeals to the sense of justice, abuse the doctrine of the right to rebellion by leading men to rebel and to expect, as a matter of justice, what no man and no government can ever give them. Reasonable radicalism can be destroyed by unreasonable expectations. Reasonable radicalism must be accompanied by reasonable conservatism.

Hence, Thomas and the Declaration of Independence distinguish between the possession of a right, in this case the right to rebel, and the exercise of a right. Speaking generally, Americans have, in hundreds of ways, rights to behave foolishly, as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others, but whether they ought to exercise those rights is another matter. The possession of a right does not automatically license its possessor to exercise it. Whether it is wise or prudent to exercise a right, whether it ought to be exercised or not, depends upon circumstances. If it is likely that the evils attendant upon the exercise of a right would outweigh the evils justly complained of, a just man, for the sake of avoiding the greater evil, does not exercise his right. If action to overthrow a despotic government is likely to lead to the imposition of a more despotic government, rebellion is not called for.3

3 Cf. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, and Plutarch's "Comparison of the Lives of Dion and Brutus."
If a certain exercise of the First Amendment right of peaceful assembly tends to undermine the very conditions of reasonable deliberation—tends to lead to situations that endanger the existence of the rule of law generally and the system of government that is the guarantor of the Bill of Rights as a whole, then that right at that time probably ought not to be exercised. As Aristotle notes in his *Politics*, it would be strange to call that action good which makes the thing it is exercised upon worse. In the exercise of his rights, as in everything else, man is responsible for the foreseeable consequences of his actions. In practice, the maintenance and extension of any right, of any freedom, depends upon the ability of the recipients to use it well.

The appeal from human law and from convention is made in the name of the natural or the reasonable. It would seem that now, in the beginning, and always, science and philosophy come into being with the awareness that a distinction can be made between nature and convention, between the reasonable and the conventional. Wherever there are philosophers (a class which can include erring philosophers) there seem to arise imitators of philosophers, sophists, or intellectuals, men who are aware of the distinction between nature and convention but who never sufficiently reflect on the reasons for conventions. The sophistic abuse of the fundamental distinctions of science and philosophy is a danger coeval with philosophy. Because of this danger one of the tasks of political philosophy is to defend decent convention, ordinary decency, against the attacks of sophistical scientism.

Why are conventions, human laws, governments, necessary? Why cannot man, the rational animal, govern himself by reason alone? Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins with the assertion: “All men by nature desire to know.” We might contrast this with the famous remark of Hobbes: “The Thoughts are to the Desires as Scouts and Spies to range abroad and find the way to the thing desired.” Thought serves desire. The two remarks are not as far apart as they might seem. In the last chapter of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is the preface to his *Politics*, he argues that while all men do desire to know, most men desire other things more. Hobbes, then, even according to Aristotle, would be right, not about all men but about most men. Those men, Aristotle suggests, for whom the desire to know dominates all the other desires are rather rare. The presence and power of those other desires make political laws, laws backed up by force and fear of punishment, necessary. As The Federalist puts it:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the

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4 1261b 10, and 1281a 20.
5 The reasonable, as understood here, would contain as species both the “historical” and the progressive.
6 Leviathan, viii.
great difficulty lies in this: you must enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government, but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions (No. 51).

Yet men hope for more than merely tolerable government. Behind the American Union and the Constitution Lincoln perceived "something ... entwining itself more closely about the human heart," namely, the principle expressed in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." About that statement he also said:

I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness, in what respects they did consider all men created equal—equal in "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." 7

The basis of these natural rights, rights which all men share, is a difference in nature. It is the difference between rational and irrational animals, between men, animals capable of thoughtful speech, and beasts, animals incapable of thoughtful speech. This difference is fundamental both for Aristotle and for the Founding Fathers. Aristotle puts more emphasis on the different ways and degrees to which men possess this capacity; but the differences of ways and degrees can never be as significant as the difference between animals which possess the faculty naturally and those which do not. 8

The distinctions emphasized by Aristotle appear to be present to Lincoln himself, when he suggests that there is a tendency in democratic society to confuse created equal "in certain inalienable rights" with the idea that all men are or ought to be equal in all respects. Such tendencies often provoke counter-tendencies or, as they say, reactions. Frustrated aspirations for some kind of genuine distinction, or authentic nobility, would seem to be behind much of the moral and political rebellion of our time, behind the outbreak of corrupt and perverted forms of heroism. If aspirations toward the heroic can only be fulfilled by

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8 Evidence from recent studies of language-type skills in great apes would appear to support this argument. Although great apes have demonstrated very interesting capacities for being taught by humans how to utilize and form linguistic-type symbols: "Only man's intelligence is sufficient for agreements to be approximated regarding the meanings/symbolic-referents of the lexical units. It would appear that the necessary intelligence levels must be higher than those of the anthropoid apes; otherwise they would have developed a public, language-type of communication in the field, if it is true that, as generally held, such communication has significant survival value." "The Mastery of Language-type Skills by the Chimpanzee (Pan)" by Duane M. Rumbaugh and Timothy V. Gill, paper presented at the New York Academy of Sciences, September, 1973. Cf. "Animal Communication and Human Language" by Emile Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics, (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), v; and Aristotle, History of Animals, VIII, 1.
becoming a part of mass political movements, demagogic chaos and its natural culmination, dictatorship, or despotism, may be unavoidable. This moral and political rebellion can, in part, be understood as a reaction to the ignoble, petty and dehumanizing elements of our life which result from the development of large-scale technology. The pollution of the natural environment and the pollution of the spiritual environment by the mass media with its propaganda and advertising have begun to make increasingly evident the problematic character of the great project for the conquest of nature first set in motion by the philosopher-scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These developments are plausible targets for reasonable reform and rebellion, for a radicalism that is both reasonable and conservative. Yet to what extent have the ominous technological developments been aggravated by the extension of the principle of equal rights for all into spheres where it does not belong? To what extent are our troubles the result of the tendency to try to make "all men equal in all respects"?

The technological development and the leveling tendency seem to go hand in hand. For example, higher productivity depends on increasing and extending mass production; mass production requires mass markets; advertising has the task of producing and maintaining those markets; and advertising, like all propaganda, appeals to the lowest common denominator of human motivation. The commitment to any set of institutions, as a practical matter, will always depend upon the style of life fostered by those institutions. The "diversity in the faculties of men," the "different and unequal faculties" of men, call for protection not only in that sphere noted by Madison (The Federalist, No. 10) but in the sphere of the production and acquisition of spiritual or intellectual goods as well. The costs of neglect, especially under conditions of affluence, could become dangerously high. To what extent is student disaffection an effect of the introduction of mass production techniques and the principle of "all men equal in all respects" into education?

Education, rightly conceived, may be essentially aristocratic. (I speak of course, not of aristocracy of birth but of aristocracy of natural talents and experience.) Education, rightly conceived, does gratify, but unlike salesmanship it never flatters. Education involves confronting oneself with minds or souls that are acknowledged to be superior in some decisive respect. It involves striving continually to raise one's own understanding to the level of one's teachers. When it is effective, one becomes aware of one's own defects; one is moved towards overcoming whatever is petty and ignoble about oneself. Salesmanship, on the other hand, caters to and thereby encourages the selfish and the petty. Education, liberating or liberal education, is not likely to win out on the open market.

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Why should the communications media be dominated by commercial rather than by educational purposes? Its defenders usually assert that their success is based upon the democratic principle of giving the people what they want.\(^\text{10}\) Is there no proper place for aristocratic preserves within democratic society? If every society requires leaders, and if liberal education is education for good leadership, and if liberal education—the antidote to conceiving of human greatness in quantitative terms—is an essentially aristocratic enterprise, democratic society requires such preserves. Should not the media, which have so much power over the formation of taste, be compelled to serve, or at least to cease from undermining, our more serious purposes?\(^\text{11}\) In general, to the extent that the advertisers succeed in forming the national character, will it not become increasingly difficult to insist that we be treated as men who deserve the rights and dignities that befit free men?\(^\text{12}\)

Can men be free without self-respect, privacy, and confidence in their abilities to control themselves?\(^\text{13}\) Have those who shape and guide our intellectual lives encouraged the growth of these qualities? To what extent is the present situation a consequence of those literary and academic fashions which blur the line between the properly private and the properly public, which identify profundity with misery, which acclaim and preach the liberation of thoughtless, even brutal, and perverted passion?

Here, however, a private predicament, parallel to the political

\(^\text{10}\) Vital Speeches of the Day, Feb. 1, 1970, speech by Dr. Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System; March 15, 1970, speech by Reuven Frank, President of National Broadcasting Company News; and June 1, 1971, speech by L. S. Matthews, president of Leo Burnett Co.


\(^\text{12}\) Perhaps the most telling comment on mass media advertising was made just after the assassination of President Kennedy, when its seemingly spontaneous banishment from the airways for three days made perfectly evident that it is simply incompatible with sustained seriousness and dignity. Periods of national mourning, however, are not the only times when serious people should be allowed to sustain a serious mood. Other free nations have separated advertising from programming altogether, and limit it to certain prescheduled times with one-half to one hour of nothing but advertising, where those who wish to be informed about advertisers’ wares may tune in without imposition being made upon those with no interest in such information.

\(^\text{13}\) To the extent that ordinary citizens cease to police themselves and each other, the tendency is to rely on appointed officials. As a result we find the increase of crime in the United States joined with a not altogether proportional expansion of police forces. Once it could be reported that: “The criminal police of the United States ... are not numerous; ... Yet I believe that in no country does crime more rarely elude punishment. The reason is that everyone conceives himself to be interested in furnishing evidence of the crime and in seizing the delinquent” (Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Phillips Bradley, [ed. [New York: Vintage Books, 1954], I: V, p. 99]). There is, apparently, a direct connection between intellectually fashionable permissiveness and this new, but evidently necessary, internal militarization of American society.
predicament with which we began, comes to light. Is not a certain shamelessness both the precondition for and the natural effect of intellectual liberation, of enlightenment? Should literature and art generally respect the sense of shame in the way suggested above? Yet shame and tact, respect for another’s sense of shame, would seem to be nature’s ways of protecting the intimate, the vulnerable, the naturally exclusive in man. If self-respect depends upon such protection, and freedom depends upon self-respect, freedom also depends upon respect for the sense of shame. No simple identification of enlightenment with edification would seem to be possible, though one might reply that enlightenment in the full sense of the word is dependent not upon shamelessness, but rather on an awareness of the problem of shame.

In conclusion, however, let us return to the more directly political question: can political institutions predicated upon equality in certain unalienable rights survive if they and the liberty they provide are not used for that cultivation of human excellence which is the ultimate justification of any good government?
Hannah Arendt

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