

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May 1985

Volume 13 Number 2

- 143 Ronna Burger Socratic *Eirōneia*
- 151 Peter Emberley Rousseau and the Management of the Passions
- 177 Robert Webking Virtue and Individual Rights in John Adams' *Defence*
- 195 Donald J. Maletz The Meaning of 'Will' in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*
- 213 Vukan Kuic Foreword for
"The Politics of Alain" by Yves R. Simon
- 215 Yves R. Simon "The Politics of Alain"
translated by John M. Dunaway
- 233 Walter Nicgorski Leo Strauss and Liberal Education

Book Reviews

- 251 Maureen Feder-Marcus *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*
by Ofelia Schutte
- 261 Richard Velkley *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies
on Plato* by Hans-Georg Gadamer, translated and
with an Introduction by P. Christopher Smith
- 268 Will Morrisey *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science,
Hermeneutics, and Praxis* by Richard J. Bernstein;
*G. W. F. Hegel: an Introduction to the Science of
Wisdom* by Stanley Rosen
- 277 Larry Arnhart *The Artist as Thinker: from Shakespeare to Joyce*
by George Anastaplo

Short Notices

- 285 J. E. Parsons, Jr. *Eighty Years of Locke Scholarship: a Bibliographical
Guide* by Roland Hall & Roger Woolhouse; *John
Locke's Moral Philosophy* by John Colman
- 287 Will Morrisey *Rhetoric and American Statesmanship* edited by Glen
Thurrow & Jeffrey D. Wallin; *Power, State, and
Freedom: an Interpretation of Spinoza's Political
Philosophy* by Douglas J. Den Uyl; *John Stuart Mill
and the Pursuit of Virtue* by Bernard Semmel; *Essays
in Political Philosophy* by J. E. Parsons, Jr.

interpretation

Volume 13 number 2

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz • Howard B. White (d. 1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula • Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Kenneth W Thompson

Associate Editors Fred Baumann • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo • Derek Cross • Edward J. Erler • Maureen Feder-Marcus • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela K. Jensen • Will Morrisey • Charles Rubin • Leslie Rubin • John A. Wettergreen • Bradford Wilson • Catherine Zuckert • Michael Zuckert

Assistant Editors Marianne C. Grey • Laurette G. Hupman

Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Annual subscription rates individual \$13; institutional \$16; student (3-year limit) \$7. *INTERPRETATION* appears three times a year.

Address for correspondence *INTERPRETATION*, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in *INTERPRETATION* are requested to follow the *MLA Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies of their work.

Copyright 1985 • Interpretation

Foreword for “The Politics of Alain” by Yves R. Simon

VUKAN KUIC

University of South Carolina

This article was first published in two installments in *La Vie intellectuelle*, in Paris, in December 1928 and January 1929. It is here reprinted for its historical, theoretical, and biographical interest.

In the past fifty years, the world has changed more and more dramatically than in any equivalent period in history. As this article shows, however, in some respects things have remained the same. The lessons of history remain unheeded, and the political debate goes on as before. Second, this article lets us see how intimately the practice of politics depends on its theory. It is beliefs about the nature of man and society that determine views of justice, equality, war, and peace. Finally, this article is worth reprinting because it marks the beginning of Yves R. Simon's quest for a decent and realistic political theory, culminating in his *Philosophy of Democratic Government*.

Alain's real name was Émile Chartier, and from before the turn of the century until the Second World War this teacher of philosophy and newspaper columnist was a major figure on the French intellectual scene. He had gone to school with Léon Blum. Élie Halévy and Paul Valéry were his good friends. Among his many students who later become famous were Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, André Maurois, and Simone Weil. Alain retired from the Collège Henry IV in 1939, but he continued to write on many topics, including art, religion, and politics, until his death in 1951. Counting works published posthumously, his bibliography contains more than sixty books. An English translation of his 1934 essay, *Les Dieux*, was published in New York in 1974. Many of his students, who used to refer to him as “The Man,” have testified that he taught them how to think, and even the most severe critics of his philosophy have invariably paid tribute to his mind and character. Some have called him a modern Montaigne, not without reason. For instance, nothing is easier, he liked to say, “than to use memory to imitate intelligence.” And because with little ingenuity one can prove almost anything, the really difficult thing, he cautioned, “is to know what one wants to prove.” But he is perhaps best known for his famous political advice to “obey but resist.” Clearly, Alain knew how to state any problem to catch attention.

To “obey but resist” may seem like a rule of conduct that could appeal only to the French, but variations of this idea have also been popular elsewhere. It is because so many Americans believe that “the best government is one that governs least” that promising to “get the government off the people's back” has helped candidates become President. Slogans such as these, as well as the democratic *Problematik* in much of the academic literature, have a common source in Rousseau. Why, Rousseau asked, is man, who is born free, everywhere in chains?

and ever since theorists of democracy have been trying to get around what is perceived as an irreconcilable conflict between man and the state, liberty and authority. True, some of these theorists are suspicious of Rousseau's solution, in which an abstract general will makes it possible for individuals to be "forced to be free." But not many have challenged his peculiar formulation of the central problem of politics and continue thus to exercise their ingenuity in devising alternative compromises. The majority of contemporary theorists of democracy would not know how to defend the proposition that there can not be liberty without authority. Yves R. Simon stands out among the exceptions.

When he wrote this article in 1929, Simon was a twenty-five-year-old graduate student of philosophy. He already had a degree from the Sorbonne and was about to receive another one from the Catholic Institute in Paris. He did not know it then, but in ten years his teaching career would bring him to America to stay. Arriving as a visiting professor, Simon continued to teach at the University of Notre Dame until 1948, when upon invitation from Robert M. Hutchins, Mortimer J. Adler, and John U. Nef he joined the graduate Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, where he stayed until his death in 1961. His bibliography, including books, major articles, translations, and posthumous publications on a large variety of subjects contains over one hundred items. But the best known of Simon's work is his *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, published in 1951. It has been reissued many times and translated into German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and recently into Italian. This is a complete treatise on the subject, covering all aspects of democratic government from universal suffrage, majority rule, and parties to its problems with modern technology. But its greatest contribution consists in resolving Rousseau's false dilemma by showing how and why it is that as liberty renders authority necessary, authority renders liberty possible.

In this article, Simon does something less ambitious. He identifies several weak spots in Alain's interpretation of politics and exposes their origin in the all too common assumption that liberty and authority are by their very nature opposed to each other. For a young student going against the sage of the land that was quite enough. It would take Simon another twenty years or so to work out and secure all the details of a different theory of democracy, which proves that "obey but resist" is not the answer. In reading this article, however, one senses that Simon already knew exactly what it was that needed proof.

“The Politics of Alain”

By Yves R. Simon

TRANSLATED BY JOHN M. DUNAWAY

Mercer University

As a philosophy professor in a city in Brittany, Alain¹ became editor-in-chief of a radical newspaper.² At that time, according to his own account, his career as a writer began. In the daily stimulus to produce a few pages of topical journalism, he found “the conditions of true thought, that is to say above all emotion, indignation, revolt.”³ His first writings were political and began with a series of responses to issues of the day. From these responses—inspirations of the moment prompted by feelings, it seems—a philosophy began progressively to emerge, without ever reaching, however, a truly scientific level.

“I was born a radical, and my father and maternal grandfather were radicals, not only in opinion, but in class, as a socialist would say, for they were of the lower middle class and rather poor. I have always had very strong feelings against tyrants and an egalitarian passion.”⁴ This sentence resembles the language of the men of 1793; modern revolutionaries have long ceased to lay the blame on tyrants, and the Internationale’s imprecations against the mining and rail kings are today more popular than the maxims of the *chant du départ*.⁵ For on February 24, 1848, the victorious bourgeoisie—solidly entrenched in its positions and having suddenly seen the Fourth Estate⁶ armed to the teeth and looming before it—moved hastily to the other side of the barricades. The split that had formerly existed between feudal lords and bourgeois would now exist between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Alain’s historical position is clear: he

(Notes bearing the notation “t.n.” have been added by the translator.)

1. Émile Chartier, known to the literary world as Alain, was born in 1868 and has taught philosophy in Lorient, in Rouen, and at the Lycée Henri IV, where he is presently teaching. His principal political works (*Mars ou la guerre jugée*, 1921; *Éléments d’une doctrine radicale*, 1925; *Le Citoyen contre les Pouvoirs*, 1926) are, with the exception of *Mars*, collections of articles that first appeared in the *Dépêche de Rouen*, *Libres Propos*, and *L’Émancipation*. Relatively little known to the public, Alain enjoys an exceptional influence among his students. (Several of Alain’s students were to become rather important thinkers and writers, among them Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and André Maurois. Alain died in 1951—t.n.)

2. *Radical*: often referred to in France as “radical-socialism,” the radical party grew out of the fall of the Second Empire in 1870. Its approximate position on the political spectrum today would be somewhat left of center, a bit less “radical” than communism or socialism. (t.n.)

3. Frédéric Lefèvre, “Une heure avec Alain,” *Nouvelles littéraires*, Feb. 18, 1928.

4. *Éléments d’une doctrine radicale*, hereafter referred to as *Éléments*, p. 303.

5. *Chant du départ*: the song traditionally sung by French soldiers as they left home for war. (t.n.)

6. *Fourth Estate*: a somewhat ironic term that designates the proletariat; based on the Estates General of the ancien régime, which recognized only three political or social entities—clergy, nobility, and commoners. (t.n.)

is a son of the Third Estate who has not defected in the face of the working-class threat. Radical like his father and his ancestor who was the enemy of the nobles, Alain remains on the side of the rebels without favoring Marx, Proudhon, or Bakunin.⁷ He does not agree that there is room in the modern world for two negations, the second of which would tend to destroy what the first had made possible—the Bourgeois Revolution and the Proletarian Revolution. In his eyes, the same spirit of independence that once put the nobility to flight must break, one after the other, all injustices and servitudes.

With a proud and obstinate mind, with unshakable, audacious, and graceful thought, with a style both polished and forceful, Alain, in whatever he writes, remains a journalist who is writing a half-column of *propos*.⁸ No author has more perfectly mastered his genre. Is anyone likely to undertake a philosophical proof or set up the framework of a grand design in the space of fifty lines? There just is not enough space. Alain moves toward discovery by soundings, he paints in quick strokes, content if he has aroused his reader from a drowsy lethargy and left him to ponder or meditate. “He is not only elegant and subtle,” writes one of my friends, “but by teasing the brain, he also often brings about some profitable reflection in the reader’s mind.”

“Bosses versus employees,” a Marxist would cry. For Alain, however, the issue is between officers and enlisted men. One is born an officer, another is born an enlisted man. The born officer is a person convinced from childhood that he is a man made for commanding others.⁹ The passion that gives life to Alain’s talent is the impatience of the little man outraged by those who presume themselves great. Untiringly, Alain directs *propos* after *propos* against the “important,” as he calls them.¹⁰ Power-hungry politicians, generals, priests, academicians, technicians, popular writers, fashionable women, high functionaries, any one found in a drawing room inspires in him a furious aversion and often some well-aimed barbs. A good observer, Alain excels in revealing the hidden side of a passion. Basically indulgent, he does not reproach the elite for weaknesses that are the lot of all people. What he cannot tolerate is the insolence of the powerful, who think they have a natural right to give orders, to humiliate others, and to acquire—at a price of their own choosing and without accountability—services that most often are a nuisance and always depend on their own good pleasure.

This criticism, all the more judicious in that it bears on such specific facts, is neither simply nor principally a moralist’s work. If Alain doesn’t describe the

7. *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (1809–1865): maverick French socialist writer who clashed with Karl Marx and whose ideas were influential among French socialists. *Bakunin, Mikhail* (1814–1876): Russian-born revolutionary leader and writer, proponent of collectivist anarchism, influenced by Proudhon. (t.n.)

8. *Propos*: literally, “remarks.” This term came to have a particular significance for Alain. It designated the genre that he patented in his brief, aphoristic essays, e.g., *Les Propos d’Alain, Propos sur le bonheur, Propos de littérature*, etc. (t.n.)

9. *Éléments*, p. 15.

10. *Éléments, Le Citoyen contre les Pouvoirs, Mars*, passim.

high functionary the way Molière describes the miser, it is because in his eyes the passions of the powerful are above all an attribute of power itself. For all their condemnations of bad kings, the Scriptures honor the royal function. Alain, on the other hand, thinks that bad kings were bad because they were kings, and his satire of blaming the system rather than individuals develops into a doctrine.

Who could fail to perceive the dangers in such a method of philosophizing? Even the most understandable whim, once crystallized into a thesis, runs the risk of replacing the essential with the accidental. He who thinks he is made for commanding others is often insufferably arrogant. But what may be concluded from this? Like any art or science, governing requires aptitudes partly innate in and partly acquired by the individual. In the sense that one person may be born to paint, another to navigate, and still another to philosophize, it is legitimate to say that a person was born to command. The existence of innate aptitudes for governing is one of the historical reasons why many have thought it good to establish a hereditary aristocracy. One must severely judge those who have been singled out by nature and history to function as leaders but shirk their duties and renounce their rights. These truths would be difficult to preserve in a doctrine born out of an angry outburst against “the important.”

Alain is not a reformer. “The true mark of a positive politics,” he writes, “is not to seek to replace one political system by another, but rather to carve out small but effective changes in the system already in existence.”¹¹ A citizen of the Third Republic, he puts up with the irresponsible president, the responsible ministers, and the legislative houses. Radicalism is not a particular kind of political organization; it is nothing other than the continuous action of the citizen against the powers that be. While it may be called outmoded by some, radicalism is actually assured of an eternal youth because it requires an effort each moment. Though it grows faint with each gesture of respect, it is born anew with each protest.¹²

Let us dismiss one misconception from the outset. Alain is so assiduous in picking quarrels with those in power, he could be mistaken for a libertarian. But on many occasions he categorically rules out such an interpretation. Far from waiting (with the absolute individualists) for peace among citizens based on their goodwill, he does not accept Proudhon’s theory that order can be the product of a contractual system of pure coordination, exclusive of all hierarchy or subordination. The order of which Alain declares himself a partisan, and which he seems to value as much as anyone, is imposed from above and cannot be conceived without authority and coercive force. Order is good, and its maintenance is possible only by power. Thus there is never a question of dismissing authority.¹³

But it is precisely here that the thrust of his criticism lies: Power tends by nature to grow excessive, aggressive, and exorbitant. Citizens will always be

11. *Éléments*, p. 53; along the same lines, *ibid.*, p. 154.

12. *Éléments*, pp. 13, 118, 122–23.

13. *Éléments*, p. 278.

sufficiently governed and they will always be too much so if they give free rein to those who govern. The political whole, by a necessary spontaneity, tends toward the extermination of its parts. Alain professes unqualified pessimism in regard to power. Society is a great beast that is incapable of listening to reason and whose instincts scoff at justice.

This great Leviathan, of which you and I are small parts, is not at all civilized. It is a child or a savage, as one might say. Whatever it is able to do, that it does immediately; its soul, if it has one, does not distinguish between might and right. If it makes promises or signs treaties, it does not consider itself bound by its word; it is only a ruse to buy time. History gives ample proof of this, and men in power, enlightened by such a philosophy, quickly adopt the same maxims. And ordinarily they are pardoned everything if only they succeed.

Now it seems to me that any democratic movement grows in opposition to the reactions of the great beast and tends to balance the natural association, let us say the social organism, by a kind of contract wrongly called social, for it is an antisocial contract. One then promises and swears to resist the instincts of the great beast and to subjugate them insofar as possible to the rules of justice that are accepted by individuals.¹⁴

Hence, Alain, like Pascal and Rousseau, acknowledges that there is no justice in the temporal manifestation of political order. But whereas Pascal resigns himself, shocked, surprised, and indignant, and whereas Rousseau promotes ideas for reform, Alain simply proposes to render the monster of society harmless by checking its immoderate impulses with the justice and reason of individuals. If it is a question of submitting Leviathan to the rules of justice, it is a submission imposed from the outside, for it is impossible to moralize the great beast. Reason, justice, and prudence are on the side of the individual. On the side of society there are instinct and violence.

Alain calls this a natural association, but is that a reason to conclude that all moral order is alien to political society? The family is a natural society even more than the State, but no one will contend that the family is purely instinctive and rebellious to morality. If it is natural for man to live in political society under the inevitable law of subordination of the parts to the whole and the parts to another (which is necessary in any kind of whole, organized entity), it is by virtue of man's reason, not his instinct. A natural thing in a higher sense (if by human nature one means nothing other than the essence of man with his specificity *and his distinctiveness* considered as a principle of activity), the State is not the product of nature, if by nature one means what is first given and precedes all rational elaboration. The creation of the State, which is necessary to the full development of man's nature, is in but very slight measure the work of instinct. It is above all the work of science, art, and prudence, three virtues of the intellect.

Those who govern have accustomed us to such a scorn of morals—or even a disregard for all ethics—that the essential amorality of the State is commonly ac-

14. *Éléments*, p. 140; along the same lines, *ibid.*, pp. 283–84. *Mars*, pp. 149–152.

cepted. At the very most one might say that there are two moral standards: one for individuals, in which acts are perceived as good or evil according to whether or not they conform to the ultimate goal of man; and the other for States, in which acts are judged good or evil according to whether or not they conform to a generalized self-interest. Even if Machiavelli had never existed, Machiavellianism would still be a popular philosophy, by reason of its great facility. One accommodates oneself to having Moloch or Leviathan as master, content with one's fate provided one feels capable of resisting its invasions.

No human conduct can be in any way approved by reason if it violates any precept of general morality. Moreover, even disregarding the rules of general morality, politics cannot be subject to morality or foreign to it. It is itself that part of morality which has as its object the common good of the perfect society. It is possible that certain acts of the public powers may fall within the province of art, not prudence, such as fiscal, military or industrial techniques. But aside from the fact that these acts remain subject, in the order of use and exercise, to the principles of general morality, they never have any character but that of means and only receive a moral meaning from the human ends to which they are ordered.

Why is there, then, such a strong prejudice in favor of the amorality of the State? Why do so many people, honest in their private lives, seem never to have questioned, in their public functions, the morality of their acts?

It must be observed in the first place that the statesman finds himself at the intersection of raging collective passions. There more than anywhere else the risks of being influenced are at their gravest. Second, any man responsible for a specific good is all the more inclined to overcome his scruples if that good concerns a greater number. Hence, a father, in order to save his family's inheritance, commits a crime that he would not have committed if he had had only to think of himself. Alain has masterfully described the pitfalls of power. But against Alain we maintain that the vices of the powerful, although of considerable frequency, are but accidents and not the necessary effects of power. If there is indeed a Leviathan, the State is not devoid of morality simply because it is a great beast, and it would be paying too high a compliment to Machiavelli to accept his definition of the Prince as correct. By exerting one's reason in the order of morality and of institutions, it still remains possible to restore political society to its true nature, which is the union in a durable and self-sufficient whole of a multitude designated by history to pursue in common the perfection of human life.

Alain hardly fears that Leviathan might grow lax and neglect its function of maintaining order. The governed, on the other hand, seem only too disposed to live and let live. Hence, in each of his innumerable political *propos*, Alain again calls the citizen back to his duty of relentless resistance. Let us take to heart the wisdom of the fables: It is our master who is our enemy. If the citizen for an instant slackens from his hostility, if he is trusting for an instant, his honor, his possessions, and his life are in danger. There is no good master; the good shep-

herd, as well as the bad, leads his animals one day to the slaughter,¹⁵ but the good shepherd gets a higher price for them. There is no good government; the most tolerable government is the one which is the best monitored.¹⁶ Freedom is resistance, democracy is resistance; resistance to power is the sum total of *real politics*.¹⁷ Power, even republican power, inevitably conserves the temperament of the Prince. But through the Republic, it is in the Prince's own palace that the people establish their counter-balancing power of reprimand and protest. That is why tyranny can lead a silent existence outside history, but the Republic is endlessly divided by the conflict between power and citizen.¹⁸

The classic distinction between political government and despotic government could find no place in Alain's thought; in his eyes, all power is despotic. This is a rash generalization. The idea of a government in which the supremacy of the whole is harmonized with the autonomy of the parts surely seems chimerical to him. It is true that all public power tends to be intrusive. Consequently, it is necessary that the parts of the political whole—if one wants them to escape an absorption equally harmful to the common good and the most particular interests—possess a right to resistance whose limits and mode cannot be arbitrary. But who would not perceive that the necessity for this resistance, common to all societies in practice, is but incidental to the political order; that it varies in inverse proportion to the perfection of power; that resistance to authority, even exerted within the fairest limits, is but a negative auxiliary of liberty and could never be confused with it? To make this recourse, which is necessary for safeguarding one part of the political order, the very essence of *real politics* is properly to turn the political order upside down.

As defined by Alain, the conflict between governing power and citizen may be ended by the latter's defeat: that is the silence of despotism accepted. On the other hand, the citizen's victory does not effect an end to the struggle, but only restrains for a time the adversary's harmfulness. Peace is out of the question. The peace of the sheepfold concludes in the drama of the slaughterhouse. We thus witness this paradox: the pacifist Alain professes a theory of power that presupposes a veritable metaphysics of war.

Let us call a philosophy of antagonisms any doctrine which, having recognized the fecundity of certain struggles, regards them as universal, perennial, and necessary. In Hegelian terms, one could say, it is any doctrine which limits itself to opposing a thesis and an antithesis without anticipating their reduction to the unity of a superior term, or which contents itself with antinomy without looking toward synthesis. Far removed, it seems, from the intentions of Hegel, whose intrepid monism uses antinomy only as a kind of springboard for setting itself in one leap firmly into the unity of synthesis, the philosophy of antagonisms

15. *Éléments*, p. 20.

16. *Le Citoyen*, p. 150.

17. *Éléments*, p. 18 et passim.

18. *Éléments*, p. 29.

has been vigorously outlined by P.-J. Proudhon; underlying various manifestations of nationalist thought, it has found its full development among the revolutionary syndicalists of the Georges Sorel¹⁹ school. Could it be that M. Julien Benda has let himself be corrupted by him whom he so bitterly criticizes?²⁰ His *Trahison des clercs* attributes to the two powers, spiritual and temporal, an equal duty to resist each other in an eternal battle.²¹

However, peace, accord, harmony, and unity are inherently good things which become evil only under certain conditions, whereas conflict and division, since they are principles of destruction, can become good things only under certain conditions. The philosophy of antagonisms rests on the foundation of a pluralist metaphysics, with which it crumbles as soon as the true properties of metaphysical unity are acknowledged. This vale of tears is not essentially a combat area. It is here below, and not just in Abraham’s bosom, that justice and peace must embrace one another. There is nothing in the natural make-up of society that presupposes necessary and eternal antagonism. What is true is that guilty passions divide us, and evil occurs in the human species more often than good. Just as war is legitimate only if it is waged with a view to peace and strikes only with a view to resuming work, the citizen’s resistance to power has no acceptable meaning unless it tends to culminate in the perfect unity of the political order.

The doctrine of antagonism rests on a misunderstanding. Because a certain kind of peace is sleep, barren and dead—*ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*—²² some conclude that life is expressed necessarily by struggle, war, and revolt; that aside from the permanent opposition of the citizen standing against the powers-that-be, there is room only for the inertia of slaves subjected to the tyrant. But peace is measured by unity. Just as there exists a certain unity contrary to the notion of multitude, there exists a certain peace that is the enemy of life. This unity stands on the side of matter; this peace, imposed by brute force, is appropriate for societies torn apart by passions. Insofar as their minds unify them, men become capable of an order in which the perfection of peace coincides with the abundance of life.

19. Georges Sorel (1847–1922): engineer and socialist thinker best known for his *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), in which he espoused the concept of war as a necessary and salutary influence on man. Anti-intellectualist in his writings, he was an important contributor to Péguy’s *Cahiers de la quinzaine*. (t.n.)

20. Julien Benda (1867–1956): rationalist and intellectualist thinker who attacked Bergson and Péguy for intuitive thought. Preferring classical values, he published a scathing indictment of modernist tendencies in philosophy, social thought, and literary criticism in *La Trahison des clercs* (1927). (t.n.)

21. Let us note that Alain’s conception of the general relations of Church and State is analogous to those of Sorel, M. Édouard Berth (principal disciple of Sorel) and Benda. But it is impossible for us to explain Alain’s religious politics without having first examined his ideas on religion. Moreover, we wish especially to point out that if M. Benda’s ideas on the spiritual and the temporal seem to be in serious error, *La Trahison des clercs* seems nonetheless an admirable work in more than one respect and certainly one of the most significant of our time.

22. *Ubi solitudinem* . . . : “Where they make a desert, they call it peace.” (t.n.)

Leviathan, as we have seen, will never willingly bend to the rules of common morality. It must be taken as it is. But this voracious beast never gives up trying to mold the citizen to its image. Nothing can be done to confer on society the characteristics of the individual. But it is possible for society to make the individual like itself. Therein lies the supreme ruse of power. Since Leviathan cannot be divided against Leviathan, when the citizen ceases to think as an individual, power reigns uncontested.²³ Consequently, one could not be too vigilant in assuring that the natural enemy of power exerts surveillance under conditions that raise one's individuality to its highest degree of purity. Since all gatherings of men participate in society, they, like society, are impulsive and unreasonable; the politics of the citizen is the work of isolated men. We are far from the profoundly organizing spirit of Auguste Comte—often cited by Alain—who used to say that we can no more make a society out of individuals than we can draw a line by juxtaposing points. (Some Bergsonian syndicalist will add: no more than one can make movement out of atoms at rest.) But it is not a matter of making a society. "In concerted action," writes Alain, "strength is added to strength, but ideas thwart and cancel each other. There remain the means of a giant with the ideas of a child. If we want a public life worthy of present humanity, it is necessary that the individual remain everywhere an individual, whether in the first rank or the last. There is none but the individual who thinks; all assemblies are mad."²⁴

A considerable number of historical facts rise against these affirmations. One thinks of the Roman Senate whose wisdom astonished kings, or a municipal council of a village where peasants, deliberating on matters with which they are well acquainted, often give a good example of prudence. But does not Alain's critique bear fully on Jacobin democracy, in which one sees thought reduced to an innocuous average, while force reaches colossal proportions? "A powerful brute with a tiny head," to use Alain's expression,²⁵ is precisely how the Jacobin State presents itself. An adversary of Jacobinism in that he refuses to worship the popular will and rejects the tyranny of the majority, Alain embraces the individualist concept of Jacobin democracy—a concession which threatens to take over the whole system. It is hardly surprising that thought is reduced to what can be produced by the good pleasure of the man in the street; neither is it surprising that there is born an inordinate force of pure and simple head-counting.

Now, if Alain excessively rails at the foolishness of assemblies, he attributes a superior wisdom to multitudes, provided that each of the individuals therein exercises his thought in a state of isolation. "A mass of electors," he writes, "in which individual errors clash and correct each other must finally give some accu-

23. *Éléments*, p. 154.

24. *Le Citoyen*, p. 159; in the same sense, *Éléments*, pp. 168ff. Cf. in particular p. 172, the notion of a Senate dispersed among the citizens and able to communicate with them but not with each other. *Mars*, p. 144.

25. *Éléments*, p. 157.

rate picture of the common interest. Bring together five hundred deputies and it is impossible for the sum total of these interests not to look more like a true knowledge of the people's needs than can be arrived at by the survey of the most impartial sociologist.”²⁶ Certainly, it is not absurd to suppose that the judgment of a multitude will prevail in quality over the judgment of the majority of those who compose that multitude.²⁷ Yet it is necessary that each one's thought be prompted and directed in some way by the prudence of institutions, a notion which goes directly against Alain's individualist ideas. For if something is to be cancelled out by the interplay of opposites, how do we know that the error of individuals will be cancelled, not their wisdom? Nothing prevents us from imagining a multitude agreeing to exalt the worst within itself. If radicalism is an error, will the individual errors of fifty thousand electors be neutralized in the person of the elected radical? And will the individual errors of two hundred fifty-one radical deputies offset one another in the single voting of an evil law? The addition of opinions voiced by individuals does not constitute an outcome, but purely and simply a sum of either justice or iniquity. It is nothing except the costly lessons of experience, often ignored by the passions.²⁸

In keeping with his individualist principles, Alain mistrusts parties²⁹ and fiercely attacks proportional representation, which, among other drawbacks, favors their interplay. He wants us to vote for the man rather than the program.³⁰

The deputy is nothing other than the citizen's permanent delegate for the general monitoring of power. Whereas each one's opinion and the very fact of suffrage express popular resistance in the first degree, the deputy represents the second degree of that resistance. His role is entirely one of criticism, denunciation, and questioning; his first duty is to remain entirely free in relation to power and the powerful and entirely submitted to his constituents.³¹ Finally the minis-

26. *Éléments*, p. 128.

27. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. I, ch. 12.

28. Let no one misunderstand our intentions: we are not putting democracy on trial here. “Universal suffrage,” wrote P.-J. Proudhon, “is a sort of atomism by which the legislator, unable to have the people speak in the unity of their essence, invites the citizens to express their opinion by the head, *virium* (“man by man” or “individually”), in absolutely the same way as the Epicurean philosopher explains thought, will, intelligence, by combinations of atoms. It is political atheism, in the worst sense of the word” (*Solution du problème social*, par. 5). Strangely enough, the critique of individualist democracy by revolutionary syndicalists faithful to Proudhon's thought is strictly analogous to that formulated against the psychological atomism of the associationists by the disciples, even the freest among them, of William James and M. Bergson. But we do not believe that the notion of democratic government entails the individualist system proper to modern democracies. One may easily conceive of a democratic society whose elements would not be individuals as such, each added to the other, but rather the already social members of natural and contractual societies existing prior to the State. Thus, suffrage—by virtue of the very fact that it would be the expression of legitimate societies, having each in its order shown proof of vitality—would be limited on the side of evil and inclined to the side of good.

29. *Le Citoyen*, p. 141.

30. *Éléments*, pp. 177ff.

31. *Éléments*, pp. 195, 198.

ter, representing the third and last degree of civic resistance, is the one delegated by the citizens to the surveillance of a particular work.³² Supreme advocate of the people, his proper function is to monitor the higher administrations, citadels of power, to take the majority side against them, to make it impossible at any moment for them to gratify their natural appetite for tyranny.³³

Thus, we have a government deprived of any role of directing, charged only with the task of restriction, a government which is not to meddle in governing, but to prevent there being too much governing. "The minister of war," writes Alain, "is not the head of the army."³⁴ Let us understand each other. The generalissimo is the supreme commander of movements to be accomplished by the army in view of its own particular end. But the minister of war, as representative of the Prince, commands the army's movements in relation to the common good of the multitude, the State's proper end. The generalissimo pursues purely and simply a particular end, the minister pursues that same end insofar as it is expressly subordinate to the State's general end. Alain's error seems to lie in holding the function of governing to be analogous with the other functions of the economy. Give the road-builder a free reign, he writes, and he will block up the road and make traffic impossible. Give the government free rein, and it will exhaust society with military expeditions.³⁵ We must denounce this assimilation of what pursues a particular good and pursues the end that is for the *whole, good, and virtuous* life of the entire multitude. The limits of political power are only defined by the State's position in the hierarchy of values; the legitimate autonomy of imperfect persons and societies limits from below the State's authority, the primacy of spiritual power limits it from above. Any particular function, on the contrary, is limited not only by reason of its degree in the hierarchy, but also by reason of the proximity to other particular interests. They are essentially different orders of things whose confusion supposes a fanciful conception of the nature of the State.

This power of resistance, which is expressed by public opinion, voting, parliamentary and ministerial monitoring, is true spiritual power.³⁶ Designed to produce liberty, it requires a refusal on the part of the citizen to respect and applaud. But the interior revolt must never develop into disobedience, for order would then perish, without which there is no liberty. The good citizen swears to obey and not to respect. The superior's command will always be executed, but whether it is just or criminal, interior assent will be equally refused.

Can you imagine this schism extended into the very intimacy of the individual? This citizen, enslaved on the temporal side and exhausting himself on the spiritual side in an eternal negation? Alain claims that a stubborn refusal of re-

32. *Éléments*, pp. 13ff., p. 94.

33. *Éléments*, p. 173, and *Le Citoyen*, p. 153.

34. *Éléments*, p. 14.

35. *Le Citoyen*, pp. 143–145.

36. *Éléments*, p. 231, pp. 276ff.

spect is favorable to exactness of obedience.³⁷ Whatever may be the observations on which this affirmation is founded, we challenge the import attributed to them. It is against nature for man to be so divided against himself; an obedience totally deprived of respect would be essentially inhuman. At the conclusion of the theory of the citizen against the powers, instead of order and liberty we have a soulless tyranny. It is, on one hand, all heaviness, and on the other hand a spiritual license more deeply anarchical than all the disorders of the street. The radical separation established by Alain between the principles of order and those of liberty presupposes a profound misapprehension of those two terms. The order of human society is an order of free moral agents or it is nothing; Leviathan can only give a parody of it. Liberty is grounded in the intelligence and consequently presupposes the faculty of adhering in common to the rational dispositions that constitute the essence of order. It is not enough to say, as does Alain, that order and liberty are correlative terms; one must recognize that human order and liberty have their common root in the rational nature of man.

Even the worst of radicals has little sympathy for socialism. The enemy of any system, he has a severe mistrust of doctrinaire men³⁸ who willingly rail at individualism, sometimes speak ill of democracy, usually lapse into opposing proportional representation, do not disdain recourse to violence, subordinate the advent of justice to their party's triumph,³⁹ and, above all else, have the unbearable naïveté to believe in the possibility of an intelligent and moral government that is the servant of the governed.⁴⁰ Even though he appears to have given little time to the study of economic problems, Alain has written some remarkable pages on the subject in which he outlines a quite penetrating criticism of certain dominant tendencies in modern industrialism.⁴¹ Unwilling to accept the unitarian concepts so widespread among socialists, he thinks the economy of a people is independent of its form of government and that the various forms of economy—proprietary, collectivist, and communist—may coexist advantageously in the same State, according to the exigencies of the various functions and the wishes of the contracting parties.⁴² Finally, he takes care to show that the economic equality desired by socialism is incapable of realizing justice and of assuring its proper duration in the absence of political equality, and that political equality contains in itself the virtual solution to the problems of the economic order.⁴³ Alain is not particularly frightened by criticisms raised against the plutocratic character of modern democracies.

Everything has been said on the servitude of political powers in regard to economic powers. Whatever may be the exaggerations due to passion or dogmatism,

37. *Éléments*, p. 282.

38. *Éléments*, p. 25.

39. *Éléments*, p. 220.

40. *Éléments*, p. 165.

41. “Let us seek productivity, not power,” in *Le Citoyen*, pp. 195–207.

42. *Éléments*, p. 232; *Le Citoyen*, p. 189.

43. *Éléments*, pp. 141, 214; *Mars*, pp. 97, 133.

it is a fact that the State's freedom is often limited on the side of good and drawn out on the side of evil by the appetites of the wealthy. All who are concerned with political reform preoccupy themselves justifiably with reducing to unity, by suppression or subordination of one of the two terms, the effective power of financiers and political authority, which is alone acknowledged by law and alone responsible. An excellent classification of reformers could be established according to the solutions proposed. Collectivist socialism, which, the sincere declarations and intentions of its leaders notwithstanding, seems destined to develop into a State socialism, settles the question in the manner of a Gordian knot by making the State the supreme manager of economic power. Conversely, revolutionary syndicalism pursues the complete absorption of political power within the economic organism. Various democratic programs propose a hybrid system in which the economic and political representatives as such share the governing of the nation. As for Communism, insofar as it is possible to define that which is a defensive reaction, a movement, an attitude, a protest, rather than a doctrine, it seems that, syndicalist and federalist by intent, it can reach the slightest beginnings of realization only under a particularly violent form of State socialism.

Among the properly political solutions, one favors the restoration of hereditary monarchs endowed with broad powers. Another proposes simply to give to the head elected by the people extensive means of observing the programs to which he has sworn to be faithful, despite political intrigue. Such is the intent of President Wilson's doctrine, a man better known in France for his humanitarian ideology than for his domestic reform projects. Alain's solution is original: It does not examine the credentials of the powers that be, foreordained by history for the direction of public affairs. However, to these powers, with the financial aristocracy, it opposes, as antithesis to thesis, an organ of resistance which must one day constrain, by virtue of its liberal and egalitarian essence, the rich to "save themselves by justice" or to "destroy themselves in base pleasures."⁴⁴

In an article entitled *Plutocracy*, dated September 9, 1911, Alain presents a firm description of financial power exerting its effect on elections. "I am surprised that socialists, who are so aware of the danger, do not see that the Republic's salvation is precisely in voting by arrondissement."⁴⁵ I can just imagine a syndicalist's laughter in reading those lines.

In the realm of foreign policy, Alain holds firm, and has for a long time, against secret diplomacy and military preparations, and in favor of securing peace through peaceful means.⁴⁶ Before 1914, he was noted for an energetic opposition to the Russian alliance and to the three-year law.⁴⁷ He entered the war as a volunteer and gleaned from that experience some new arguments against

44. *Éléments*, p. 142.

45. *Éléments*, p. 42.

46. *Le Citoyen*, p. 32.

47. *The three-year law*: mandatory military service. (t.n.)

power, as well as a wealth of observations. Let us note that the war seems not to have modified Alain’s thought on a single important point. The criticisms that he directs at the politics of 1922 follow the same lines as those that he was already formulating in 1912 against the actions of M. Poincaré.

Few writers have cast as much light on the psychological origins of war and the deeper motives of the man of arms. Here as elsewhere, Alain demonstrates exceptional analytical gifts. With a shrug of the shoulders he rejects the idea, so common among socialists, that wars are caused by conflicting interests and that a change in economic regimes would put an end to them.⁴⁸ Interests always give in, he writes, but passions remain intransigent; war is born of passions. A rather forced point, perhaps, but a valuable one, nonetheless. Even though the modern economy entails, among other evils, a fearful tendency to set peoples against one another in unjust conflicts, it is extremely naïve to impute to the capitalist system sole responsibility for quarrels that are often the work of popular imperialism. Alain reduces to its true proportions the efficaciousness of patriotism, which is usually incapable of assuring the execution of civic duties in peacetime and not very costly in regard to the sacrifice of life.⁴⁹ Nevertheless he rails at those who identify the warrior’s passion with those of the thief and murderer. It is not to plunder that men fight; if that were true the base love of money would soon win out over war.⁵⁰ All war is waged in the name of rights, and each offers his life in order to save his honor.⁵¹ With at least a partial success, Alain pushes to great lengths his analysis of the sense of honor in the soldier.

Consequently, he invites his readers to acknowledge their own responsibility for bringing about the catastrophe. Before heaping the blame on the kaiser, the czar, or capitalism, let each examine his conscience and ask himself if he hasn’t promoted, if only by his inertia, the effects of passion that give birth to war. Alain furiously opposes the idea of war’s fated inevitability.⁵² The will decides between war and peace, although war is produced without positively willing it if one gives in to its causes even in the slightest degree. Peace can only be maintained at the cost of a constant, concerted effort. Alain tirelessly denounces power’s affinities for war.⁵³

The conduct of war, and specifically of modern warfare, inspires some of his most beautifully bitter pages. He forcefully describes that massive action of immense armies in which personal valor counts for little, the survival of the fittest is replaced by their massacre, and enthusiasm gives way to a bleak passivity.⁵⁴ He

48. *Éléments*, p. 251.

49. *Mars*, pp. 9–10.

50. *Le Citoyen*, p. 63; *Mars*, pp. 41, 46, 47.

51. *Le Citoyen*, p. 67.

52. *Mars*, pp. 156, 162, 186; *Le Citoyen*, p. 87.

53. *Éléments*, pp. 239–40. War reinforces despotism and despotism leads to war. *Mars*, pp. 80, 134.

54. *Le Citoyen*, p. 42.

willingly reiterates that all the evils of peacetime could never produce as much grief and ruin as a few days of war,⁵⁵ but he does not annoy the reader by lingering, as would a Georges Duhamel,⁵⁶ on the horrors that he has witnessed. He goes right to the point, which is a pure and simple condemnation of war. Similarly, when he relates the abuses of military power, it is not to seek out and punish some officer or general. He comes close to absolving them, alleging that the state of war required them to act as they did. He quickly passes over individuals' crimes, the better to accuse the system.⁵⁷ This is a clever method, but it leads to injustice, as much by its indulgence as by its severity. I am not prepared to accept the requirements of discipline as an excuse for certain atrocious judgments rendered by war councils, nor to agree that such abuses prove that military discipline in general is to be condemned. I find here again that deplorable confusion of the essential and the accidental, pointed out earlier in relation to the theory of power. The same criticism is to be applied here, with the addition that no power is so ready to be abused and so capable of deadly abuses as military power.

On the justice itself of war, Alain's thought develops into several theses. In the first place, he affirms that war necessarily entails a greater amount of injustice than the wrongs it purports to rectify.⁵⁸ On this point, there are broad concessions to be made to Alain's ideas if one considers the particular case of modern European wars. It is clearly one of the conditions of a just war that it not cause harm that is disproportionate to the disorders to be redressed. In the second place, Alain considers that since war is incapable of producing peace, it is all the more incapable of assuring the triumph of right. Peace, far from being born of right, is the necessary precondition of it.⁵⁹ True justice consists of accepting in advance the arbiter's sentence, whatever it be.⁶⁰ Revendication of right, if it is not preceded by this peaceful disposition and limited by it, can only engender holy war, which is all the more ferocious by virtue of its idealism. But war culminates in the more or less full triumph of the stronger party, and the treaty that ends it, imposed by force, is just another act of war, extrinsic to the juridical order and eminently favorable to the maintenance of warlike passions. Like Rousseau,⁶¹ Alain acknowledges that the power of the strong cannot create the slightest shred of moral obligation.⁶² He concludes that the peace treaty, sanctioning victory, carries for the vanquished only a purely physical submission, alien to the order of the will, which constitutes peace. The logic of reasoning is

55. *Éléments*, pp. 253–55.

56. *Georges Duhamel* (1884–1966): Medical doctor and author of *Civilisation* (1918), a description of the suffering he witnessed in military hospitals during the First World War. The book won the Prix Goncourt. (t.n.)

57. *Mars*, pp. 27–28. "One must never suggest nor allow oneself to believe that war is compatible in any sense whatever with justice and humanity."

58. *Éléments*, pp. 235–36.

59. *Le Citoyen*, pp. 62ff.

60. *Le Citoyen*, p. 64.

61. *Contrat social*, I, 3.

62. *Mars*, p. 174.

impeccable, but the conclusion shocks the common sentiment of peoples, invincibly persuaded that the document signed following a just victory commits by the same token the honor and conscience of both parties. One must point out the equivocacy of the greater and ask oneself whether the power of the stronger party, incapable of creating right, is not in certain circumstances likely to contribute, in the manner of efficient cause, to the determination of a right whose formal principle must be sought in universal common good.

Finally, Alain emphasizes that it is never legitimate to accept as a means to any end, no matter how noble, the certain death of a man.⁶³ He assimilates purely and simply under the relation of moral quality the action of a commander who launches an offensive, knowing that it will cost a certain number of human lives, and that of a war council that has innocent people shot down.⁶⁴ Why, then, vilify the latter, if the former was only doing his duty? And if one condemns the latter, how can one justify the former?

But if the proposed assimilation is accepted, one must condemn for suicide the man who exposes himself to certain death for the good of his fellow man, and—think of the impact of this consequence—one must denounce martyrs along with military heroes and conclude with M. Maxime Leroy:

Not one idea, no matter how beautiful and profound, is worth the death of a man. Is not every idea but an approximation? On the day that humanity knows this, and on that day only, will we make a decisive step toward peace, toward the call, repeated from age to age, of our old misery *to the mercy, the nobility of sincere agnosticism*.⁶⁵

Here we see some important secrets unveiled in only a few lines. Truth must be loved more than life (*durus est hic sermo*).⁶⁶ If, then, one wishes to reject self-sacrifice, the witness by suffering and death, one must first, according to the hard requirements of truth, prefer “the nobility of sincere agnosticism.” Certainly, it is hardly conceivable that virtue would flourish in a society in which it would be commonly acknowledged that no idea is worth a man’s death. But let us go only so far as to observe that since moral acts are specified by their ends, it is impossible to assimilate, as Alain does, the act of imposing death on an innocent man or of exposing an innocent man to certain death. The ends are essentially different. Leaping into the sea in order to make room in an overloaded boat for a woman and her child is not suicide but heroic devotion. The proof lies in the fact that one who thus sacrifices himself will struggle as long as possible not to go under and will cling until the last moment to the hope of finding a lifeline.

“I have always had a strong antipathy for tyrants and an egalitarian passion.” Resistance to power—all power and above all military power—is the essential means of radical politics; equality is its supreme end.

63. “There is no earthly end, for a man, that may take as a clear inevitable means the death of another man. If so, it is a criminal act.” *Mars*, p. 154.

64. *Le Citoyen*, p. 104.

65. M. Leroy, *Henri de Saint-Simon*. Italics mine.

66. *Durus est hic sermo*: “This is a hard saying” (John 6:60). (t.n.)

“What,” cries Alain, “is justice? It is equality.”⁶⁷ Not at all a false equation, but an equivocal one. It would be preferable to say, “All justice is a certain equality,” for there exists more than one kind of justice. Now it appears that in the matter of equality, Alain conceives only material equality, which is only appropriate to commutative justice. He correctly observes that an exchange is unjust if the values exchanged are not equal,⁶⁸ and from there concludes that “just laws are those that strive to make all equal: men, women, children, the ill, and the ignorant.” An accurate statement if it means only that the State must see to it that citizens observe the laws of equitable exchange; a spurious one if it signifies, as it doubtless does, that unequal individuals must be treated as equals by the powers that be. Alain cannot allow himself to exclude, as P.-J. Proudhon did, the idea of distributive justice, *totius ad partes*,⁶⁹ for his doctrine preserves the notion of a political whole endowed with authority. But in failing to recognize that distributive justice is regulated by equality of proportion, he corrupts it, conceiving it on the model of commutative justice. As with Rousseau, we see justice ultimately sacrificed to an illusory equality.

“The egalitarian spirit,” writes Alain, “goes against nature, in which everything is unequal and forces are formed. The egalitarian spirit desires equality and justice in spite of everything. If it is objected that such is not the case, it answers, with a kind of illuminated faith that such must and shall be the case. It is really a religion — the revolutionary mystique.”⁷⁰

Illuminated faith, religion, mystique. These are hardly reassuring terms. We know that such votive candles have ignited conflagrations. However, there is today hardly a political party which does not appeal to faith or lay claim to a mystique in support of its doctrine. Let us examine the notion of a political faith.

Faith is like opinion in that it excludes the apperception of objective evidence; it is like science in that it implies firm assent. Faith is best defined as a virtue through which the believer, impelled by grace, holds the assurance of that which he does not see. This supernatural virtue, superior to science, entertains only a distant analogy with the belief—subjectively certain but always subject to reservations in regard to free judgment—which is born in the soul in the presence of a truth that is only probable, through the effect of eloquence, poetry, or any other charm. This kind of natural faith often takes the place of science in the practical order and may prove capable of determining energetic resolutions. But unless one is to drift into pragmatism—of which Alain is horrified—or attribute the faculty of judging to the will, as the good Cartesian Alain does, who would deny that a proven conclusion is preferable to a probable judgment, artificially rend-

67. *Éléments*, p. 143.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Totius ad partes*: “From the whole to the parts.”

70. *Éléments* . . . , p. 290. Cf. *Propos sur le Christianisme*, pp. 120ff., 131.

The translator wishes to acknowledge the kind help of Professor A. Eliot Youman, Mercer University, in translating the Latin phrases in this essay.

ered certain by a heart in thrall? If it is objected that the demands of action are pressing, that since proof is lacking, as is often the case in political matters, one must press forward, without an unshakable inner certitude, let us then answer that ages of experience have sufficiently proven the misdeeds of sentimental politics. Even in politics it is always possible to assure oneself of a certain baggage of proven truths. The rest is a matter of *prudence*, not of *faith* without grace or a *mystique* without gifts. And if enthusiasm is necessary for bold and persevering action, nothing is more capable of inspiring it than the splendor of proven truths and the familiar charm of the singular rules of action, which are known at the outset by the prudent. It is not a question of releasing bands of cold reasoners into the melee but of acknowledging by judgment alone, scientific or prudential, the legitimate paternity of enthusiasm.

Because metaphysics is the only science in the natural order that merits the name of wisdom, it is proper for metaphysics to exert a sovereign, though not despotic, power over any other particular discipline. It alone attains the absolute universal, as opposed to this or that universal; it alone climbs to absolute first principles. Hence it has the competence to judge with finality, insofar as its object seems involved, any conclusion proposed by an inferior science. Metaphysics draws circles, if I may say so, within which freedom is great and outside which there is room for nothing but the absurd. By keeping himself within the boundaries defined by metaphysics the scholar satisfies the most elementary condition of his security, and at little expense he avoids a great deal of wasted time and research doomed in advance to failure.

In several particular respects the light of metaphysics is indispensable to politics. The science of governing the human multitude in the direction of the common good presupposes a definition of the nature of man and his ultimate purpose. Thus, insofar as it comes under the rubric of an art, it is from metaphysics that politics learns the general laws and necessary conditions of its object.

Now while Alain's political works abound in astute moral observations, their properly theoretical content seems marred by serious errors, including errors concerning the nature of power and its relation to the governed; errors concerning order, liberty, and justice; and errors concerning war and peace. What is the source of these errors? Has he speculated on politics apart from and in disregard of philosophy? That is hardly likely, for he is a philosopher, and a very logical one at that. We must therefore conclude that Alain's political errors rather reflect a number of deeper philosophical errors.