

## The Aftermath

Rationality, in the sense of an appeal to a universal and impersonal standard of truth, is of supreme importance..., not only in ages in which it easily prevails, but also, and even more, in those less fortunate times in which it is despised and rejected as the vain dream of men who lack the virility to kill where they cannot agree. —BERTRAND RUSSELL.

### Chapter 23: The Sociology of Knowledge

It can hardly be doubted that Hegel's and Marx's historicist philosophies are characteristic products of their time—a time of social change. Like the philosophies of Heraclitus and Plato, and like those of Comte and Mill, Lamarck and Darwin, they are philosophies of change, and they witness to the tremendous and undoubtedly somewhat terrifying impression made by a changing social environment on the minds of those who live in this environment. Plato reacted to this situation by attempting to arrest all change. The more modern social philosophers appear to react very differently, since they accept, and even welcome, change; yet this love of change seems to me a little ambivalent. For even though they have given up any hope of arresting change, as historicists they try to predict it, and thus to bring it under rational control; and this certainly looks like an attempt to tame it. Thus it seems that, to the historicist, change has not entirely lost its terrors. In our own time of still more rapid change, we even find the desire not only to predict change, but to control it by centralized large-scale planning. These holistic views (which I have criticized in *The Poverty of Historicism*) represent a compromise, as it were, between Platonic and Marxian theories. Plato's will to arrest change, combined with Marx's doctrine of its inevitability, yield, as a kind of Hegelian 'synthesis', the demand that since it cannot be entirely arrested, change should at least be 'planned', and controlled by the state whose power is to be vastly extended. An attitude like this may seem, at first sight, to be a kind of rationalism; it is closely related to Marx's dream of the 'realm of freedom' in which man is for the first time master of his own fate. But as a matter of fact, it occurs in closest alliance with a doctrine which is definitely opposed to rationalism (and especially to the doctrine of the rational unity of mankind; see chapter 24), one which is well in keeping with the irrationalist and mystical tendencies of our time. I have in mind the Marxist doctrine that our opinions, including our moral and scientific opinions, are determined by class interest, and more generally by the social and historical situation of our time. Under the name of 'sociology of knowledge' or 'sociologism', this doctrine has been developed recently (especially by M. Scheler and K. Mannheim) as a theory of the social determination of scientific knowledge. The sociology of knowledge argues that scientific thought, and especially thought on social and political matters, does not proceed in a vacuum, but in a socially conditioned atmosphere. It is influenced largely by unconscious or subconscious elements. These elements remain hidden from the thinker's observing eye because they form, as it were, the very place which he inhabits, his *social habitat*. The social habitat of the thinker determines a whole system of opinions and theories which appear to him as unquestionably true or self-evident. They appear to him as if they were logically and trivially true, such as, for example, the sentence 'all tables are tables'. This is why he is not even aware of having made any assumptions at all. But that he has made assumptions can be seen if we compare him with a thinker who lives in a very different social habitat; for he too will proceed from a system of apparently unquestionable assumptions, but from a very different one; and it may be so different that no intellectual bridge may exist and no compromise be possible between these two systems. Each of these different socially determined systems of assumptions is called by the sociologists of knowledge a *total ideology*. The sociology of knowledge can be considered as a Hegelian version of Kant's theory of knowledge. For it continues on the lines of Kant's criticism of what we may term the 'passivist' theory of knowledge. I mean by this the theory of the empiricists down to and including Hume, a theory which may be described, roughly, as holding that knowledge streams into us through our senses, and that error is due to our interference with the sense-given material, or to the associations which have developed within it; the best way of avoiding error

is to remain entirely passive and receptive. Against this receptacle theory of knowledge (I usually call it the 'bucket theory of the mind'), Kant argued that knowledge is not a collection of gifts received by our senses and stored in the mind as if it were a museum, but that it is very largely the result of our own mental activity; that we must most actively engage ourselves in searching, comparing, unifying, generalizing, if we wish to attain knowledge. We may call this theory the 'activist' theory of knowledge. In connection with it, Kant gave up the untenable ideal of a science which is free from any kind of presuppositions. (That this ideal is even self-contradictory will be shown in the next chapter.) He made it quite clear that we cannot start from nothing, and that we have to approach our task equipped with a system of presuppositions which we hold without having tested them by the empirical methods of science; such a system may be called a 'categorical apparatus'. Kant believed that it was possible to discover the one true and unchanging categorical apparatus, which represents as it were the necessarily unchanging framework of our intellectual outfit, i.e. human 'reason'. This part of Kant's theory was given up by Hegel, who, as opposed to Kant, did not believe in the unity of mankind. He taught that man's intellectual outfit was constantly changing, and that it was part of his social heritage; accordingly the development of man's reason must coincide with the historical development of his society, i.e. of the nation to which he belongs. This theory of Hegel's, and especially his doctrine that all knowledge and all truth is 'relative' in the sense of being determined by history, is sometimes called 'historism' (in contradistinction to 'historicism', as mentioned in the last chapter). The sociology of knowledge or 'sociologism' is obviously very closely related to or nearly identical with it, the only difference being that, under the influence of Marx, it emphasizes that the historical development does not produce one uniform 'national spirit', as Hegel held, but rather several and sometimes opposed 'total ideologies' within one nation, according to the class, the social stratum, or the social habitat, of those who hold them. But the likeness to Hegel goes further. I have said above that according to the sociology of knowledge, no intellectual bridge or compromise between different total ideologies is possible. But this radical scepticism is not really meant quite as seriously as it sounds. There is a way out of it, and the way is analogous to the Hegelian method of superseding the conflicts which preceded him in the history of philosophy. Hegel, a spirit freely poised above the whirlpool of the dissenting philosophies, reduced them all to mere components of the highest of syntheses, of his own system. Similarly, the sociologists of knowledge hold that the 'freely poised intelligence' of an intelligentsia which is only loosely anchored in social traditions may be able to avoid the pitfalls of the total ideologies; that it may even be able to see through, and to unveil, the various total ideologies and the hidden motives and other determinants which inspire them. Thus the sociology of knowledge believes that the highest degree of objectivity can be reached by the freely poised intelligence analyzing the various hidden ideologies and their anchorage in the unconscious. The way to true knowledge appears to be the unveiling of unconscious assumptions, a kind of psycho-therapy, as it were, or if I may say so, a *socio-therapy*. Only he who has been socio-analyzed or who has socio-analyzed himself, and who is freed from this social complex, i.e. from his social ideology, can attain to the highest synthesis of objective knowledge. In a previous chapter, when dealing with 'Vulgar Marxism' I mentioned a tendency which can be observed in a group of modern philosophies, the tendency to unveil the hidden motives behind our actions. The sociology of knowledge belongs to this group, together with psycho-analysis and certain philosophies which unveil the 'meaninglessness' of the tenets of their opponents. The popularity of these views lies, I believe, in the ease with which they can be applied, and in the satisfaction which they confer on those who see through things, and through the follies of the unenlightened. This pleasure would be harmless, were it not that all these ideas are liable to destroy the intellectual basis of any discussion, by establishing what I have called a 'reinforced dogmatism'. (Indeed, this is something rather similar to a 'total ideology'.) Hegelianism does it by declaring the admissibility and even fertility of contradictions. But if contradictions need not be avoided, then any criticism and any discussion becomes impossible since criticism always consists in pointing out contradictions either within the theory to be criticized, or between it and some facts of experience. The situation with psycho-analysis is similar: the psycho-analyst can always explain away any objections by showing that they are due to the repressions of the critic. And the philosophers of meaning,

again, need only point out that what their opponents hold is meaningless, which will always be true, since 'meaninglessness' can be so defined that any discussion about it is by definition without meaning. Marxists, in a like manner, are accustomed to explain the disagreement of an opponent by his class bias, and the sociologists of knowledge by his total ideology. Such methods are both easy to handle and good fun for those who handle them. But they clearly destroy the basis of rational discussion, and they must lead, ultimately, to anti-rationalism and mysticism. In spite of these dangers, I do not see why I should entirely forgo the fun of handling these methods. For just like the psychoanalysts, the people to whom psycho-analysis applies best, the socio-analysts invite the application of their own methods to themselves with an almost irresistible hospitality. For is not their description of an intelligentsia which is only loosely anchored in tradition a very neat description of their own social group? And is it not also clear that, assuming the theory of total ideologies to be correct, it would be part of every total ideology to believe that one's own group was free from bias, and was indeed that body of the elect which alone was capable of objectivity? Is it not, therefore, to be expected, always assuming the truth of this theory, that those who hold it will unconsciously deceive themselves by producing an amendment to the theory in order to establish the objectivity of their own views? Can we, then, take seriously their claim that by their sociological self-analysis they have reached a higher degree of objectivity; and their claim that socio-analysis can cast out a total ideology? But we could even ask whether the whole theory is not simply the expression of the class interest of this particular group; of an intelligentsia only loosely anchored in tradition, though just firmly enough to speak Hegelian as their mother tongue. How little the sociologists of knowledge have succeeded in socio-therapy that is to say, in eradicating their own total ideology, will be particularly obvious if we consider their relation to Hegel. For they have no idea that they are just repeating him; on the contrary, they believe not only that they have outgrown him, but also that they have successfully seen through him, socio-analyzed him; and that they can now look at him, not from any particular social habitat, but objectively, from a superior elevation. This palpable failure in self-analysis tells us enough. But, all joking apart, there are more serious objections. The sociology of knowledge is not only self-destructive, not only a rather gratifying object of socio-analysis, it also shows an astounding failure to understand precisely its main subject, the *social aspects of knowledge*, or rather, of scientific method. It looks upon science or knowledge as a process in the mind or 'consciousness' of the individual scientist, or perhaps as the product of such a process. If considered in this way, what we call scientific objectivity must indeed become completely ununderstandable, or even impossible; and not only in the social or political sciences, where class interests and similar hidden motives may play a part, but just as much in the natural sciences. Everyone who has an inkling of the history of the natural sciences is aware of the passionate tenacity which characterizes many of its quarrels. No amount of political partiality can influence political theories more strongly than the partiality shown by some natural scientists in favour of their intellectual offspring. If scientific objectivity were founded, as the sociologic theory of knowledge naively assumes, upon the individual scientist's impartiality or objectivity, then we should have to say good-bye to it. Indeed, we must be in a way more radically sceptical than the sociology of knowledge; for there is no doubt that we are all suffering under our own system of prejudices (or 'total ideologies', if this term is preferred); that we all take many things as self-evident, that we accept them uncritically and even with the naive and cocksure belief that criticism is quite unnecessary; and scientists are no exception to this rule, even though they may have superficially purged themselves from some of their prejudices in their particular field. But they have not purged themselves by socio-analysis or any similar method; they have not attempted to climb to a higher plane from which they can understand, socio-analyze, and expurgate their ideological follies. For by making their minds more 'objective' they could not possibly attain to what we call 'scientific objectivity'. No, what we usually mean by this term rests on different grounds. It is a matter of scientific method. And, ironically enough, objectivity is closely bound up with the *social aspect of scientific method*, with the fact that science and scientific objectivity do not (and cannot) result from the attempts of an individual scientist to be 'objective', but from the *friendly-hostile co-operation of many scientists*. Scientific objectivity can be described as the inter-subjectivity of scientific method. But this social

aspect of science is almost entirely neglected by those who call themselves sociologists of knowledge. Two aspects of the method of the natural sciences are of importance in this connection. Together they constitute what I may term the 'public character of scientific method'. First, there is something approaching *free criticism*. A scientist may offer his theory with the full conviction that it is unassailable. But this will not impress his fellow-scientists and competitors; rather it challenges them: they know that the scientific attitude means criticizing everything, and they are little deterred even by authorities. Secondly, scientists try to avoid talking at cross-purposes. (I may remind the reader that I am speaking of the natural sciences, but a part of modern economics may be included.) They try very seriously to speak one and the same language, even if they use different mother tongues. In the natural sciences this is achieved by recognizing experience as the impartial arbiter of their controversies. When speaking of 'experience' I have in mind experience of a 'public' character, like observations, and experiments, as opposed to experience in the sense of more 'private' aesthetic or religious experience; and an experience is 'public' if everybody who takes the trouble can repeat it. In order to avoid speaking at cross-purposes, scientists try to express their theories in such a form that they can be tested, i.e. refuted (or else corroborated) by such experience. This is what constitutes scientific objectivity. Everyone who has learned the technique of understanding and testing scientific theories can repeat the experiment and judge for himself. In spite of this, there will always be some who come to judgments which are partial, or even cranky. This cannot be helped, and it does not seriously disturb the working of the various *social institutions* which have been designed to further scientific objectivity and criticism; for instance the laboratories, the scientific periodicals, the congresses. This aspect of scientific method shows what can be achieved by institutions designed to make public control possible, and by the open expression of public opinion, even if this is limited to a circle of specialists. Only political power, when it is used to suppress free criticism, or when it fails to protect it, can impair the functioning of these institutions, on which all progress, scientific, technological, and political, ultimately depends. In order to elucidate further still this sadly neglected aspect of scientific method, we may consider the idea that it is advisable to characterize science by its methods rather than by its results. Let us first assume that a clairvoyant produces a book by dreaming it, or perhaps by automatic writing. Let us assume, further, that years later as a result of recent and revolutionary scientific discoveries, a great scientist (who has never seen that book) produces one precisely the same. Or to put it differently we assume that the clairvoyant 'saw' a scientific book which could not then have been produced by a scientist owing to the fact that many relevant discoveries were still unknown at that date. We now ask: is it advisable to say that the clairvoyant produced a scientific book? We may assume that, if submitted at the time to the judgment of competent scientists, it would have been described as partly understandable, and partly fantastic; thus we shall have to say that the clairvoyant's book was not when written a scientific work, since it was not the result of scientific method. I shall call such a result, which, though in agreement with some scientific results, is not the product of scientific method, a piece of 'revealed science'. In order to apply these considerations to the problem of the publicity of scientific method, let us assume that Robinson Crusoe succeeded in building on his island physical and chemical laboratories, astronomical observatories, etc., and in writing a great number of papers, based throughout on observation and experiment. Let us even assume that he had unlimited time at his disposal, and that he succeeded in constructing and in describing scientific systems which actually coincide with the results accepted at present by our own scientists. Considering the character of this Crusonian science, some people will be inclined, at first sight, to assert that it is real science and not 'revealed science'. And, no doubt, it is very much more like science than the scientific book which was revealed to the clairvoyant, for Robinson Crusoe applied a good deal of scientific method. And yet, I assert that this Crusonian science is still of the 'revealed' kind; that there is an element of scientific method missing, and consequently, that the fact that Crusoe arrived at our results is nearly as accidental and miraculous as it was in the case of the clairvoyant. For there is nobody but himself to check his results; nobody but himself to correct those prejudices which are the unavoidable consequence of his peculiar mental history; nobody to help him to get rid of that strange blindness concerning the inherent possibilities of our own results which is a consequence of the fact that most of

them are reached through comparatively irrelevant approaches. And concerning his scientific papers, it is only in attempts to explain his work to *somebody who has not done it* that he can acquire the discipline of clear and reasoned communication which too is part of scientific method. In one point—a comparatively unimportant one—is the ‘revealed’ character of the Crusonian science particularly obvious; I mean Crusoe’s discovery of his ‘personal equation’ (for we must assume that he made this discovery), of the characteristic personal reaction-time affecting his astronomical observations. Of course it is conceivable that he discovered, say, changes in his reaction-time, and that he was led, in this way, to make allowances for it. But if we compare this way of finding out about reaction-time, with the way in which it was discovered in ‘public’ science—through the contradiction between the results of various observers—then the ‘revealed’ character of Robinson Crusoe’s science becomes manifest. To sum up these considerations, it may be said that what we call ‘scientific objectivity’ is not a product of the individual scientist’s impartiality, but a product of the social or public character of scientific method; and the individual scientist’s impartiality is, so far as it exists, not the source but rather the result of this socially or institutionally organized objectivity of science. Both Kantians and Hegelians make the same mistake of assuming that our presuppositions (since they are, to start with, undoubtedly indispensable instruments which we need in our active ‘making’ of experiences) can neither be changed by decision nor refuted by experience; that they are above and beyond the scientific methods of testing theories, constituting as they do the basic presuppositions of all thought. But this is an exaggeration, based on a misunderstanding of the relations between theory and experience in science. It was one of the greatest achievements of our time when Einstein showed that, in the light of experience, we may question and revise our presuppositions regarding even space and time, ideas which had been held to be necessary presuppositions of all science, and to belong to its ‘categorical apparatus’. Thus the sceptical attack upon science launched by the sociology of knowledge breaks down in the light of scientific method. The empirical method has proved to be quite capable of taking care of itself. But it does so not by eradicating our prejudices all at once; it can eliminate them only one by one. The classical case in point is again Einstein’s discovery of our prejudices regarding time. Einstein did not set out to discover prejudices; he did not even set out to criticize our conceptions of space and time. His problem was a concrete problem of physics, the re-drafting of a theory that had broken down because of various experiments which in the light of the theory seemed to contradict one another. Einstein together with most physicists realized that this meant that the theory was false. And he found that if we alter it in a point which had so far been held by everybody to be self-evident and which had therefore escaped notice, then the difficulty could be removed. In other words, he just applied the methods of scientific criticism and of the invention and elimination of theories, of trial and error. But this method does not lead to the abandonment of all our prejudices; rather, we can discover the fact that we had a prejudice only after having got rid of it. But it certainly has to be admitted that, at any given moment, our scientific theories will depend not only on the experiments, etc., made up to that moment, but also upon prejudices which are taken for granted, so that we have not become aware of them (although the application of certain logical methods may help us to detect them). At any rate, we can say in regard to this incrustation that science is capable of learning, of breaking down some of its crusts. The process may never be perfected, but there is no fixed barrier before which it must stop short. Any assumption can, in principle, be criticized. And that anybody may criticize constitutes scientific objectivity. Scientific results are ‘relative’ (if this term is to be used at all) only in so far as they are the results of a certain stage of scientific development and liable to be superseded in the course of scientific progress. But this does not mean that *truth* is ‘relative’. If an assertion is true, it is true for ever. It only means that most scientific results have the character of hypotheses, i.e. statements for which the evidence is inconclusive, and which are therefore liable to revision at any time. These considerations (with which I have dealt more fully elsewhere), though not necessary for a criticism of the sociologists, may perhaps help to further the understanding of their theories. They also throw some light, to come back to my main criticism, on the important role which co-operation, intersubjectivity, and the publicity of method play in scientific criticism and scientific progress. It is true that the social sciences have not yet fully attained this publicity of method. This is due

partly to the intelligence-destroying influence of Aristotle and Hegel, partly perhaps also to their failure to make use of the social instruments of scientific objectivity. Thus they are really 'total ideologies', or putting it differently, some social scientists are unable, and even unwilling, to speak a common language. But the reason is not class interest, and the cure is not a Hegelian dialectical synthesis, nor self-analysis. The only course open to the social sciences is to forget all about the verbal fireworks and to tackle the practical problems of our time with the help of the theoretical methods which are fundamentally the same in *all* sciences. I mean the methods of trial and error, of inventing hypotheses which can be practically tested, and of submitting them to practical tests. *A social technology is needed whose results can be tested by piecemeal social engineering.* The cure here suggested for the social sciences is diametrically opposed to the one suggested by the sociology of knowledge. Sociologism believes that it is not their unpractical character, but rather the fact that practical and theoretical problems are too much intertwined in the field of social and political knowledge, that creates the methodological difficulties of these sciences. Thus we can read in a leading work on the sociology of knowledge: "The peculiarity of political knowledge, as opposed to "exact" knowledge, lies in the fact that knowledge and will, or the rational element and the range of the irrational, are inseparably and essentially intertwined.' To this we can reply that 'knowledge' and 'will' are, in a certain sense, always inseparable; and that this fact need not lead to any dangerous entanglement. No scientist can know without making an effort, without taking an interest; and in his effort there is usually even a certain amount of self-interest involved. The engineer studies things mainly from a practical point of view. So does the farmer. Practice is not the enemy of theoretical knowledge but the most valuable incentive to it. Though a certain amount of aloofness may be becoming to the scientist, there are many examples to show that it is not always important for a scientist to be thus disinterested. But it is important for him to remain in touch with reality, with practice, for those who overlook it have to pay by lapsing into scholasticism. Practical application of our findings is thus the means by which we may eliminate irrationalism from social science, and not any attempt to separate knowledge from 'will'. As opposed to this, the sociology of knowledge hopes to reform the social sciences by making the social scientists aware of the social forces and ideologies which unconsciously beset them. But the main trouble about prejudices is that there is no such direct way of getting rid of them. For how shall we ever know that we have made any progress in our attempt to rid ourselves from prejudice? Is it not a common experience that those who are most convinced of having got rid of their prejudices are most prejudiced? The idea that a sociological or a psychological or an anthropological or any other study of prejudices may help us to rid ourselves of them is quite mistaken; for many who pursue these studies are full of prejudice; and not only does self-analysis not help us to overcome the unconscious determination of our views, it often leads to even more subtle self-deception. Thus we can read in the same work on the sociology of knowledge the following references to its own activities: "There is an increasing tendency towards making conscious the factors by which we have so far been unconsciously ruled ... Those who fear that our increasing knowledge of determining factors may paralyse our decisions and threaten "freedom" should put their minds at rest. For only he is truly determined who does not know the most essential determining factors but acts immediately under the pressure of determinants unknown to him.' Now this is clearly just a repetition of a pet idea of Hegel's which Engels naively repeated when he said: 'Freedom is the appreciation of necessity.' And it is a reactionary prejudice. For are those who act under the pressure of well-known determinants, for example, of a political tyranny, made free by their knowledge? Only Hegel could tell us such tales. But that the sociology of knowledge preserves this particular prejudice shows clearly enough that there is no possible short-cut to rid us of our ideologies. (Once a Hegelian, always a Hegelian.) Self-analysis is no substitute for those practical actions which are necessary for establishing the democratic institutions which alone can guarantee the freedom of critical thought, and the progress of science.

## **Chapter 24: Oracular Philosophy and the Revolt**

### **Against Reason**

Marx was a rationalist. With Socrates, and with Kant, he believed in human reason as the basis of the unity

of mankind. But his doctrine that our opinions are determined by class interest hastened the decline of this belief. Like Hegel's doctrine that our ideas are determined by national interests and traditions, Marx's doctrine tended to undermine the rationalist belief in reason. Thus threatened both from the right and from the left, a rationalist attitude to social and economic questions could hardly resist when historicist prophecy and oracular irrationalism made a frontal attack on it. This is why the conflict between rationalism and irrationalism has become the most important intellectual, and perhaps even moral, issue of our time.

I

Since the terms 'reason' and 'rationalism' are vague, it will be necessary to explain roughly the way in which they are used here. First, they are used in a wide sense; they are used to cover not only intellectual activity but also observation and experiment. It is necessary to keep this remark in mind, since 'reason' and 'rationalism' are often used in a different and more narrow sense, in opposition not to 'irrationalism' but to 'empiricism'; if used in this way, rationalism extols intelligence above observation and experiment, and might therefore be better described as 'intellectualism'. But when I speak here of 'rationalism', I use the word always in a sense which includes 'empiricism' as well as 'intellectualism'; just as science makes use of experiments as well as of thought. Secondly, I use the word 'rationalism' in order to indicate, roughly, an attitude that seeks to solve as many problems as possible by an appeal to reason, i.e. to clear thought and experience, rather than by an appeal to emotions and passions. This explanation, of course, is not very satisfactory, since all terms such as 'reason' or 'passion' are vague; we do not possess 'reason' or 'passions' in the sense in which we possess certain physical organs, for example, brains or a heart, or in the sense in which we possess certain 'faculties', for example, the power of speaking, or of gnashing our teeth. In order therefore to be a little more precise, it may be better to explain rationalism in terms of practical attitudes or behavior. "We could then say that rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that *'I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth.'* It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such means as argument and careful observation, people may reach some kind of agreement on many problems of importance; and that, even where their demands and their interests clash, it is often possible to argue about the various demands and proposals, and to reach—perhaps by arbitration—a compromise which, because of its equity, is acceptable. To most, if not to all. In short, the rationalist attitude, or, as I may perhaps label it, the 'attitude of reasonableness', is very similar to the scientific attitude, to the belief that in the search for truth we need co-operation, and that, with the help of argument, we can in time attain something like objectivity. It is of some interest to analyze this resemblance between this attitude of reasonableness and that of science more fully. In the last chapter, I tried to explain the social aspect of scientific method with the help of the fiction of a scientific Robinson Crusoe. An exactly analogous consideration can show the social character of reasonableness, as opposed to intellectual gifts, or cleverness. Reason, like language, can be said to be a product of social life. A Robinson Crusoe (marooned in early childhood) might be clever enough to master many difficult situations; but he would invent neither language nor the art of argumentation. Admittedly, we often argue with ourselves; but we are accustomed to do so only because we have learned to argue with others, and because we have learned in this way that the argument counts, rather than the person arguing. (This last consideration cannot, of course, tip the scales when we argue with ourselves.) Thus we can say that we owe our reason, like our language, to intercourse with other men. The fact that the rationalist attitude considers the argument rather than the person arguing is of far-reaching importance. It leads to the view that we must recognize everybody with whom we communicate as a potential source of argument and of reasonable information; it thus establishes what may be described as the 'rational unity of mankind'. In a way, our analysis of 'reason' may be said to resemble slightly that of Hegel and the Hegelians, who consider reason as a social product and indeed as a kind of department of the soul or the spirit of society (for example, of the nation,

or the class) and who emphasize, under the influence of Burke, our indebtedness to our social heritage, and our nearly complete dependence on it. Admittedly, there is some similarity. But there are very considerable differences also. Hegel and the Hegelians are collectivists. They argue that, since we owe our reason to 'society'—or to a certain society such as a nation—'society' is everything and the individual nothing; or that whatever value the individual possesses is derived from the collective, the real carrier of all values. As opposed to this, the position presented here does not assume the existence of collectives; if I say, for example, that we owe our reason to 'society', then I always mean that we owe it to certain concrete individuals—though perhaps to a considerable number of anonymous individuals—and to our intellectual intercourse with them. Therefore, in speaking of a 'social' theory of reason (or of scientific method), I mean more precisely that the theory is an *inter-personal* one, and never that it is a collectivist theory. Certainly we owe a great deal to tradition, and tradition is very important, but the term 'tradition' also has to be analyzed into concrete personal relations. And if we do this, then we can get rid of that attitude which considers every tradition as sacrosanct, or as valuable in itself, replacing this by an attitude which considers traditions as valuable or pernicious, as the case may be, according to their influence upon individuals. We thus may realize that each of us (by way of example and criticism) may contribute to the growth or the suppression of such traditions. The position here adopted is very different from the popular, originally Platonic, view of reason as a kind of 'faculty', which may be possessed and developed by different men in vastly different degrees. Admittedly, intellectual gifts may be different in this way, and they may contribute to reasonableness; but they need not. Clever men may be very unreasonable; they may cling to their prejudices and may not expect to hear anything worthwhile from others. According to our view, however, we not only owe our reason to others, but we can never excel others in our reasonableness in a way that would establish a claim to authority; authoritarianism and rationalism in our sense cannot be reconciled, since argument, which includes criticism, and the art of listening to criticism, is the basis of reasonableness. Thus rationalism in our sense is diametrically opposed to all those modern Platonic dreams of brave new worlds in which the growth of reason would be controlled or 'planned' by some superior reason. Reason, like science, grows by way of mutual criticism; the only possible way of 'planning' its growth is to develop those institutions that safeguard the freedom of this criticism, that is to say, the freedom of thought. It may be remarked that Plato, even though his theory is authoritarian, and demands the strict control of the growth of human reason in his guardians (as has been shown especially in chapter 8), pays tribute, *by his manner of writing*, to our inter-personal theory of reason; for most of his earlier dialogues describe arguments conducted in a very reasonable spirit. My way of using the term 'rationalism' may become a little clearer, perhaps, if we distinguish between a true rationalism and a false or a pseudo-rationalism. What I shall call the 'true rationalism' is the rationalism of Socrates. It is the awareness of one's limitations, the intellectual modesty of those who know how often they err, and how much they depend on others even for this knowledge. It is the realization that we must not expect too much from reason; that argument rarely settles a question, although it is the only means for learning—not to see clearly, but to see more clearly than before. What I shall call 'pseudo-rationalism' is the intellectual intuitionism of Plato. It is the immodest belief in one's superior intellectual gifts, the claim to be initiated, to know with certainty, and with authority. According to Plato, opinion—even 'true opinion', as we can read in the *Timaeus* —' is shared by all men; 3but 'reason' (or 'intellectual intuition') 'is shared only by the gods, and by very few men' This authoritarian intellectualism, this belief in the possession of an infallible instrument of discovery, or an infallible method, this failure to distinguish between a man's intellectual powers and his indebtedness to others for all he can possibly know or understand, this pseudo-rationalism is often called 'rationalism', but it is diametrically opposed to what we call by this name. My analysis of the rationalist attitude is undoubtedly very incomplete, and, I readily admit, a little vague; but it will suffice for our purpose. In a similar way I shall now describe irrationalism, indicating at the same time how an irrationalist is likely to defend it. The irrationalist attitude may be developed along the following lines. Though perhaps recognizing reason and scientific argument as tools that may do well enough if we wish to scratch the surface of things, or as means to serve some irrational end, the irrationalist will insist that

'human nature' is in the main, not rational. Man, he holds, is more than a rational animal, and also less. In order to see that he is less, we need only consider how small is the number of men who are capable of argument; this is why, according to the irrationalist, the majority of men will always have to be tackled by an appeal to their emotions and passions rather than by an appeal to their reason. But man is also more than just a rational animal, since all that really matters in his life goes beyond reason. Even the few scientists who take reason and science seriously are bound to their rationalist attitude merely because they love it. Thus even in these rare cases, it is the emotional make-up of man and not his reason that determines his attitude. Moreover, it is his intuition, his mystical insight into the nature of things, rather than his reasoning which makes a great scientist. Thus rationalism cannot offer an adequate interpretation even of the apparently rational activity of the scientist. But since the scientific field is exceptionally favourable to a rationalist interpretation, we must expect that rationalism will fail even more conspicuously when it tries to deal with other fields of human activity. And this expectation, so the irrationalist will continue his argument, proves to be quite accurate. Leaving aside the lower aspects of human nature, we may look to one of its highest, to the fact that man can be creative. It is the small creative minority of men who really matter; the men who create works of art or of thought, the founders of religions, and the great statesmen. These few exceptional individuals allow us to glimpse the real greatness of man. But although these leaders of mankind know how to make use of reason for their purposes, they are never men of reason. Their roots lie deeper—deep in their instincts and impulses, and in those of the society of which they are parts. Creativeness is an entirely irrational, a mystical faculty...

## II

The issue between rationalism and irrationalism is of long standing. Although Greek philosophy undoubtedly started off as a rationalist undertaking, there were streaks of mysticism even in its first beginnings. It is (as hinted in chapter 10) the yearning for the lost unity and shelter of tribalism which expresses itself in these mystical elements within a fundamentally rational approach. An open conflict between rationalism and irrationalism broke out for the first time in the Middle Ages, as the opposition between scholasticism and mysticism. (It is perhaps not without interest that rationalism flourished in the former Roman provinces, while men from the 'barbarian' countries were prominent among the mystics.) In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, when the tide of rationalism, of intellectualism, and of 'materialism' was rising, irrationalists had to pay some attention to it, to argue against it; and by exhibiting its limitations, and exposing the immodest claims and dangers of pseudo-rationalism (which they did not distinguish from rationalism in our sense), some of these critics, notably Burke, have earned the gratitude of all true rationalists. But the tide has now turned, and 'profoundly significant allusions ... and allegories' (as Kant puts it) have become the fashion of the day. An oracular irrationalism has established (especially with Bergson and the majority of German philosophers and intellectuals) the habit of ignoring or at best deploring the existence of such an inferior being as a rationalist. To them the rationalists—or the 'materialists', as they often say—and especially, the rationalist scientist, are the poor in spirit, pursuing soulless and largely mechanical activities, and completely unaware of the deeper problems of human destiny and of its philosophy. And the rationalists usually reciprocate by dismissing irrationalism as sheer nonsense. Never before has the break been so complete. And the break in the diplomatic relations of the philosophers proved its significance when it was followed by a break in the diplomatic relations of the states. In this issue, I am entirely on the side of rationalism. This is so much the case that even where I feel that rationalism has gone too far I still sympathize with it, holding as I do that an excess in this direction (as long as we exclude the intellectual immodesty of Plato's pseudo-rationalism) is harmless indeed as compared with an excess in the other. In my opinion, the only way in which excessive rationalism is likely to prove harmful is that it tends to undermine its own position and thus to further an irrationalist reaction. It is only this danger which induces me to examine the claims of an excessive rationalism more closely and to advocate a modest and self-critical rationalism which recognizes certain

limitations. Accordingly, I shall distinguish in what follows between two rationalist positions, which I label 'critical rationalism' and 'uncritical rationalism' or 'comprehensive rationalism'. (This distinction is independent of the previous one between a 'true' and a 'false' rationalism, even though a 'true' rationalism in my sense will hardly be other than critical.) Uncritical or comprehensive rationalism can be described as the attitude of the person who says 'I am not prepared to accept anything that cannot be defended by means of argument or experience'. We can express this also in the form of the principle that any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or by experience is to be discarded. Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded. (It is analogous to the paradox of the liar, i.e. to a sentence which asserts its own falsity.)

7Uncritical rationalism is therefore logically untenable; and since a purely logical argument can show this, uncritical rationalism can be defeated by its own chosen weapon, argument. This criticism may be generalized. Since all argument must proceed from assumptions, it is plainly impossible to demand that all assumptions should be based on argument. The demand raised by many philosophers that we should start with no assumption whatever and never assume anything about 'sufficient reason', and even the weaker demand that we should start with a very small set of assumptions ('categories'), are both in this form inconsistent. For they themselves rest upon the truly colossal assumption that it is possible to start without, or with only a few assumptions, and still to obtain results that are worthwhile. (Indeed, this principle of avoiding all presuppositions is not, as some may think, a counsel of perfection, but a form of the paradox of the liar.)

8Now all this is a little abstract, but it may be restated in connection with the problem of rationalism in a less formal way. The rationalist attitude is characterized by the importance it attaches to argument and experience. But neither logical argument nor experience can establish the rationalist attitude; for only those who are ready to consider argument or experience, and who have therefore adopted this attitude already, will be impressed by them. That is to say, a rationalist attitude must be first adopted if any argument or experience is to be effective, and it cannot therefore be based upon argument or experience. (And this consideration is quite independent of the question whether or not there exist any convincing rational arguments which favour the adoption of the rationalist attitude.) We have to conclude from this that no rational argument will have a rational effect on a man who does not want to adopt a rational attitude. Thus a comprehensive rationalism is untenable. But this means that whoever adopts the rationalist attitude does so because he has adopted, consciously or unconsciously, some proposal, or decision, or belief, or behaviour; an adoption which may be called 'irrational'. Whether this adoption is tentative or leads to a settled habit, we may describe it as an irrational *faith in reason*. So rationalism is necessarily far from comprehensive or self-contained. This has frequently been overlooked by rationalists who thus exposed themselves to a beating in their own field and by their own favourite weapon whenever an irrationalist took the trouble to turn it against them. And indeed it did not escape the attention of some enemies of rationalism that one can always refuse to accept arguments, either all arguments or those of a certain kind; and that such an attitude can be carried through without becoming logically inconsistent. This led them to see that the uncritical rationalist who believes that rationalism is self-contained and can be established by argument must be wrong. Irrationalism is logically superior to uncritical rationalism. Then why not adopt irrationalism? Many who started as rationalists but were disillusioned by the discovery that a too comprehensive rationalism defeats itself have indeed practically capitulated to irrationalism. (This is what has happened to Whitehead, if I am not quite mistaken.) But such panic action is

9entirely uncalled for. Although an uncritical and comprehensive rationalism is logically untenable, and although a comprehensive irrationalism is logically tenable, this is no reason why we should adopt the latter. For there are other tenable attitudes, notably that of critical rationalism which recognizes the fact that the fundamental rationalist attitude results from an (at least tentative) act of faith—from faith in reason. Accordingly, our choice is open. We may choose some form of irrationalism, even some radical or comprehensive form. But we are also free to choose a critical form of rationalism, one which frankly admits its origin in an irrational decision (and which, to that extent, admits a certain priority of irrationalism).

The choice before us is not simply an intellectual affair, or a matter of taste. It is a moral decision (in the sense of chapter 5).<sup>10</sup> For the question whether we adopt some more or less radical form of irrationalism, or whether we adopt that minimum concession to irrationalism which I have termed 'critical rationalism', will deeply affect our whole attitude towards other men, and towards the problems of social life. It has already been said that rationalism is closely connected with the belief in the unity of mankind. Irrationalism, which is not bound by any rules of consistency, may be combined with any kind of belief, including a belief in the brotherhood of man; but the fact that it may easily be combined with a very different belief, and especially the fact that it lends itself easily to the support of a romantic belief in the existence of an elect body, in the division of men into leaders and led, into natural masters and natural slaves, shows clearly that a moral decision is involved in the choice between it and a critical rationalism. As we have seen before (in chapter 5), and now again in our analysis of the uncritical version of rationalism, arguments cannot *determine* such a fundamental moral decision. But this does not imply that our choice cannot be *helped* by any kind of argument whatever. On the contrary, whenever we are faced with a moral decision of a more abstract kind, it is most helpful to analyze carefully the consequences which are likely to result from the alternatives between which we have to choose. For only if we can visualize these consequences in a concrete and practical way, do we really know what our decision is about; otherwise we decide blindly. In order to illustrate this point, I may quote a passage from Shaw's *Saint Joan*. The speaker is the Chaplain; he has stubbornly demanded Joan's death; but when he sees her at the stake, he breaks down: 'I meant no harm. I did not know what it would be like... I did not know what I was doing... If I had known, I would have torn her from their hands. You don't know. You haven't seen: it is so easy to talk when you don't know. You madden yourself with words... But when it is brought home to you; when you see the thing you have done; when it is blinding your eyes, stifling your nostrils, tearing your heart, then—then—O God, take away this sight from me!' There were, of course, other figures in Shaw's play who knew exactly what they were doing, and yet decided to do it; and who did not regret it afterwards. Some people dislike seeing their fellow men burning at the stake and others do not. This point (which was neglected by many Victorian optimists) is important, for it shows that a rational analysis of the consequences of a decision does not make the decision rational; the consequences do not determine our decision; it is always we who decide. But an analysis of the concrete consequences, and their clear realization in what we call our 'imagination', makes the difference between a blind decision and a decision made with open eyes; and since we use our imagination very little, we only too often decide blindly.<sup>11</sup> This is especially so if we are intoxicated by an oracular philosophy, one of the most powerful means of maddening ourselves with words—to use Shaw's expression. The rational and imaginative analysis of the consequences of a moral theory has a certain analogy in scientific method. For in science, too, we do not accept an abstract theory because it is convincing in itself; we rather decide to accept or reject it after we have investigated those concrete and practical consequences which can be more directly tested by experiment. But there is a fundamental difference. In the case of a scientific theory, our decision depends upon the results of experiments. If these confirm the theory, we may accept it until we find a better one. If they contradict the theory, we reject it. But in the case of a moral theory, we can only confront its consequences with our conscience. And while the verdict of experiments does not depend upon ourselves, the verdict of our conscience does. I hope I have made it clear in which sense the analysis of consequences may influence our decision without determining it. And in presenting the consequences of the two alternatives between which we must decide, rationalism and irrationalism, I warn the reader that I shall be partial. So far, in presenting the two alternatives of the moral decision before us—it is, in many senses, the most fundamental decision in the ethical field—I have tried to be impartial, although I have not hidden my sympathies. But now I am going to present those considerations of the consequences of the two alternatives which appear to me most telling, and by which I myself have been influenced in rejecting

irrationalism and accepting the faith in reason. Let us examine the consequences of irrationalism first. The irrationalist insists that emotions and passions rather than reason are the mainsprings of human action. To the rationalist's reply that, though this may be so, we should do what we can to remedy it, and should try to make reason play as large a part as it possibly can, the irrationalist would rejoin (if he condescends to a discussion) that this attitude is hopelessly unrealistic. For it does not consider the weakness of 'human nature', the feeble intellectual endowment of most men and their obvious dependence upon emotions and passions. It is my firm conviction that this irrational emphasis upon emotion and passion leads ultimately to what I can only describe as crime. One reason for this opinion is that this attitude, which is at best one of resignation towards the irrational nature of human beings, at worst one of scorn for human reason, must lead to an appeal to violence and brutal force as the ultimate arbiter in any dispute. For if a dispute arises, then this means that those more constructive emotions and passions which might in principle help to get over it, reverence, love, devotion to a common cause, etc., have shown themselves incapable of solving the problem. But if that is so, then what is left to the irrationalist except the appeal to other and less constructive emotions and passions, to fear, hatred, envy, and ultimately, to violence? This tendency is very much strengthened by another and perhaps even more important attitude which also is in my opinion inherent in irrationalism, namely, the stress on the inequality of men. It cannot, of course, be denied that human individuals are, like all other things in our world, in very many respects very unequal. Nor can it be doubted that this inequality is of great importance and even in many respects highly desirable. (The fear that the development of mass production and collectivization may react upon men by destroying their inequality or individuality is one of the nightmares of our times.) But all this simply has no bearing upon the question whether or not we should decide to treat men, especially in political issues, as equals, or as much like equals as is possible; that is to say, as possessing equal rights, and equal claims to equal treatment; and it has no bearing upon the question whether we ought to construct political institutions accordingly. 'Equality before the law' is *not a fact but a political demand based upon a moral decision*; and it is quite independent of the theory—which is probably false—that 'all men are born equal'. Now I do not intend to say that the adoption of this humanitarian attitude of impartiality is a direct consequence of a decision in favour of rationalism. But a tendency towards impartiality is closely related to rationalism, and can hardly be excluded from the rationalist creed. Again, I do not intend to say that an irrationalist could not consistently adopt an equalitarian or impartial attitude; and even if he could not do so consistently, he is not bound to be consistent. But I do wish to stress the fact that the irrationalist attitude can hardly avoid becoming entangled with the attitude that is opposed to equalitarianism. This fact is connected with its emphasis upon emotions and passions; for we cannot feel the same emotions towards everybody. Emotionally, we all divide men into those who are near to us, and those who are far from us. The division of mankind into friend and foe is a most obvious emotional division; and this division is even recognized in the Christian commandment, 'Love thy enemies!' Even the best Christian who really lives up to this commandment (there are not many, as is shown by the attitude of the average good Christian towards 'materialists' and 'atheists'), even he cannot feel equal love for all men. We cannot really love 'in the abstract'; we can love only those whom we know. Thus the appeal even to our best emotions, love and compassion, can only tend to divide mankind into different categories. And this will be more true if the appeal is made to lesser emotions and passions. Our 'natural' reaction will be to divide mankind into friend and foe; into those who belong to our tribe, to our emotional community, and those who stand outside it; into believers and unbelievers; into compatriots and aliens; into class comrades and class enemies; and into leaders and led. I have mentioned before that the theory that our thoughts and opinions are dependent upon our class situation, or upon our national interests, must lead to irrationalism. I now wish to emphasize the fact that the opposite is also true. The abandonment of the rationalist attitude, of the respect for reason and argument and the other fellow's point of view, the stress upon the 'deeper' layers of human nature, all this must lead to the view that thought is merely a somewhat superficial manifestation of what lies within these irrational depths. It must nearly always, I believe, produce an attitude which considers the person of the thinker instead of his thought. It must produce the belief that 'we think with

our blood', or 'with our national heritage', or with our class'. This view may be presented in a materialist form or in a highly spiritual fashion; the idea that we 'think with our race' may perhaps be replaced by the idea of elect or inspired souls who 'think by God's grace'. I refuse, on moral grounds, to be impressed by these differences; for the decisive similarity between all these intellectually immodest views is that they do not judge a thought on its own merits. By thus abandoning reason, they split mankind into friends and foes; into the few who share in reason with the gods, and the many who don't (as Plato says); into the few who stand near and the many who stand far; into those who speak the untranslatable language of our own emotions and passions and those whose tongue is not our tongue. Once we have done this, political equalitarianism becomes practically impossible. Now the adoption of an anti-equalitarian attitude in political life, i.e. in the field of problems concerned with the power of man over man, is just what I should call criminal. For it offers a justification of the attitude that different categories of people have different rights; that the master has the right to enslave the slave; that some men have the right to use others as their tools. Ultimately, it will be used, as in Plato, to justify murder. 151 do not overlook the fact that there are irrationalists who love mankind, and that not all forms of irrationalism engender criminality. But I hold that he who teaches that not reason but love should rule opens the way for those who rule by hate. (Socrates, I believe, saw something of this when he suggested that mistrust or 16 hatred of argument is related to mistrust or hatred of man.) Those who do not see this connection at once, who believe in a direct rule of emotional love, should consider that love as such certainly does not promote impartiality. And it cannot do away with conflict either. That love as such may be unable to settle a conflict can be shown by considering a harmless test case, which may pass as representative of more serious ones. Tom likes the theatre and Dick likes dancing. Tom lovingly insists on going to a dance while Dick wants for Tom's sake to go to the theatre. This conflict cannot be settled by love; rather, the greater the love, the stronger will be the conflict. There are only two solutions; one is the use of emotion, and ultimately of violence, and the other is the use of reason, of impartiality, of reasonable compromise. All this is not intended to indicate that I do not appreciate the difference between love and hate, or that I think that life would be worth living without love. (And I am quite prepared to admit that the Christian idea of love is not meant in a purely emotional way.) But I insist that no emotion, not even love, can replace the rule of institutions controlled by reason. This, of course, is not the only argument against the idea of a rule of love. Loving a person means wishing to make him happy. (This, by the way, was Thomas Aquinas' definition of love.) But of all political ideals, that of making the people happy is perhaps the most dangerous one. It leads invariably to the attempt to impose our scale of 'higher' values upon others in order to make them realize what seems to us of greatest importance for their happiness; in order, as it were, to save their souls. It leads to Utopianism and Romanticism. We all feel certain that everybody would be happy in the beautiful, the perfect community of our dreams. And no doubt, there would be heaven on earth if we could all love one another. But, as I have said before (in chapter 9), the attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell. It leads to intolerance. It leads to religious wars, and to the saving of souls through the inquisition. And it is, I believe, based on a complete misunderstanding of our moral duties. It is our duty to help those who need our help; but it cannot be our duty to make others happy, since this does not depend on us, and since it would only too often mean intruding on the privacy of those towards whom we have such amiable intentions. The political demand for piecemeal (as opposed to Utopian) methods corresponds to the decision that the fight against suffering must be considered a duty, while the right to care for the happiness of others must be considered a privilege confined to the close circle of their friends. In their case, we may perhaps have a certain right to try to impose our scale of values—our preferences regarding music, for example. (And we may even feel it our duty to open to them a world of values which, we trust, can so much contribute to their happiness.) This right of ours exists only if, and because, they can get rid of us; because friendships can be ended. But the use of political means for imposing our scale of values upon others is a very different matter. Pain, suffering, injustice, and their prevention, these are the eternal problems of public morals, the 'agenda' of public policy (as Bentham would have said). The 'higher' values should very largely be considered as 'non-agenda', and should be left to the realm of *laissez faire*. Thus we might say:

help your enemies; assist those in distress, even if they hate you; but love only your friends. This is only part of the case against irrationalism, and of the consequences which induce me to adopt the opposite attitude, that is, a critical rationalism. This latter attitude with its emphasis upon argument and experience, with its device 'I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort we may get nearer to the truth', is, as mentioned before, closely akin to the scientific attitude. It is bound up with the idea that everybody is liable to make mistakes, which may be found out by himself, or by others, or by himself with the assistance of the criticism of others. It therefore suggests the idea that nobody should be his own judge, and it suggests the idea of impartiality. (This is closely related to the idea of 'scientific objectivity' as analyzed in the previous chapter.) Its faith in reason is not only a faith in our own reason, but also—and even more—in that of others. Thus a rationalist, even if he believes himself to be intellectually superior to others, will reject all claims to authority <sup>17</sup>since he is aware that, if his intelligence is superior to that of others (which is hard for him to judge), it is so only in so far as he is capable of learning from criticism as well as from his own and other people's mistakes, and that one can learn in this sense only if one takes others and their arguments seriously. Rationalism is therefore bound up with the idea that the other fellow has a right to be heard, and to defend his arguments. It thus implies the recognition of the claim to tolerance, at least of all those who are <sup>18</sup>not intolerant themselves. One does not kill a man when one adopts the attitude of first listening to his arguments. (Kant was right when he based the 'Golden Rule' on the idea of reason. To be sure, it is impossible to prove the rightness of any ethical principle, or even to argue in its favour in just the manner in which we argue in favour of a scientific statement. Ethics is not a science. But although there is no 'rational scientific basis' of ethics, there is an ethical basis of science, and of rationalism.) Also the idea of impartiality leads to that of responsibility; we have not only to listen to arguments, but we have a duty to respond, to answer, where our actions affect others. Ultimately, in this way, rationalism is linked up with the recognition of the necessity of social institutions to protect freedom of criticism, freedom of thought, and thus the freedom of men. And it establishes something like a moral obligation towards the support of these institutions. This is why rationalism is closely linked up with the political demand for practical social engineering—piecemeal engineering, of course—in the humanitarian sense, with the demand for the rationalization of society, for planning for freedom, and for its control by reason; <sup>19</sup>not by 'science', not by a Platonic, a pseudo-rational authority, but by that Socratic reason which is aware of its limitations, and which therefore respects the other man and does not aspire to coerce him—not even into happiness. The adoption of rationalism implies, moreover, that there is a common medium of communication, a common language of reason; it establishes something like a moral obligation towards that language, the obligation to keep up its standards of clarity and to use it in such <sup>20</sup>a way that it can retain its function as the vehicle of argument. That is to say, to use it plainly; to use it as an instrument of rational communication, of significant information, rather than as a means of 'self-expression', as the vicious romantic jargon of most of our educationists has it. (It is characteristic of the modern romantic hysteria that it combines a Hegelian collectivism concerning 'reason' with an excessive individualism concerning 'emotions': thus the emphasis on language as a means of self-expression instead of a means of communication. Both attitudes, of course, are parts of the revolt against reason.) And it implies the recognition that mankind is united by the fact that our different mother tongues, in so far as they are rational, can be translated into one another. It recognizes the unity of human reason. A few remarks may be added concerning the relation of the rationalist attitude to the attitude of readiness to use what is usually called 'imagination'. It is frequently assumed that imagination has a close affinity with emotion and therefore with irrationalism, and that rationalism rather tends towards an unimaginative dry scholasticism. I do not know whether such a view may have some psychological basis, and I rather doubt it. But my interests are institutional rather than psychological, and from an institutional point of view (as well as from that of method) it appears that rationalism must encourage the use of imagination because it needs it, while irrationalism must tend to discourage it. The very fact that rationalism is critical, whilst irrationalism must tend towards dogmatism (where there is no argument, nothing is left but full acceptance or fiat denial), leads in this direction. Criticism always demands a certain degree of imagination, whilst dogmatism suppresses it. Similarly,

scientific research and technical construction and invention are inconceivable without a very considerable use of imagination; one must offer something new in these fields (as opposed to the field of oracular philosophy where an endless repetition of impressive words seems to do the trick). At least as important is the part played by imagination in the practical application of equalitarianism and of impartiality. The basic attitude of the rationalist, 'I may be wrong and you may be right', demands, when put into practice, and especially when human conflicts are involved, a real effort of our imagination. I admit that the emotions of love and compassion may sometimes lead to a similar effort. But I hold that it is humanly impossible for us to love, or to suffer with, a great number of people; nor does it appear to me very desirable that we should, since it would ultimately destroy either our ability to help or the intensity of these very emotions. But reason, supported by imagination, enables us to understand that men who are far away, whom we shall never see, are like ourselves, and that their relations to one another are like our relations to those we love. A direct emotional attitude towards the abstract whole of mankind seems to me hardly possible. We can love mankind only in certain concrete individuals. But by the use of thought and imagination, we may become ready to help all who need our help. All these considerations show, I believe, that the link between rationalism and humanitarianism is very close, and certainly much closer than the corresponding entanglement of irrationalism with the anti-equalitarian and anti-humanitarian attitude. I believe that as far as possible this result is corroborated by experience. A rationalist attitude seems to be usually combined with a basically equalitarian and humanitarian outlook; irrationalism, on the other hand, exhibits in most cases at least some of the anti-equalitarian tendencies described, even though it may often be associated with humanitarianism also. My point is that the latter connection is anything but well founded.

#### *IV*

I have tried to analyse those consequences of rationalism and irrationalism which induce me to decide as I do. I wish to repeat that the decision is largely a moral decision. It is the decision to try to take argument seriously. This is the difference between the two views; for irrationalism will use reason too, but without any feeling of obligation; it will use it or discard it as it pleases. But I believe that the only attitude which I can consider to be morally right is one which recognizes that we owe it to other men to treat them and ourselves as rational. Considered in this way, my counter-attack upon irrationalism is a moral attack. The intellectualist who finds our rationalism much too commonplace for his taste, and who looks out for the latest esoteric intellectual fashion, which he discovers in the admiration of medieval mysticism, is not, one fears, doing his duty by his fellow men. He may think himself and his subtle taste superior to our 'scientific age', to an 'age of industrialization' which carries its brainless division of labour and its 'mechanization' and 'materialization' even into the field of human thought. But he only shows that he is incapable of appreciating the moral forces inherent in modern science. The attitude I am attacking can perhaps be illustrated by the following passage which I take from A. Keller; a passage that seems to me a typical expression of this romantic hostility towards science: 'We seem to be entering upon a new era where the human soul is regaining its mystical and religious faculties, and protesting, by inventing new myths, against the materialization and mechanization of life. The mind suffered when it had to serve humanity as technician, as chauffeur; it is reawakening again as poet and prophet, obeying the command and leadership of dreams which seem to be quite as wise and reliable as, but more inspiring and stimulating than, intellectual wisdom and scientific programmes. The myth of revolution is a reaction against the unimaginative banality and conceited self-sufficiency of bourgeois society and of an old tired culture. It is the adventure of men who have lost all security and are embarking on dreams instead of concrete facts.' In analyzing this passage I wish first, but only in passing, to draw attention to its typical historicist character and to its moral futurism ('entering a new era', 'old and tired culture', etc.). But more important even than to realize the technique of the word-magic which the passage uses is to ask whether what it says is true. Is it true that our soul protests against the materialization and mechanization of our life, that it

protests against the progress we have made in the fight against the untold suffering through hunger and pestilence which characterized the Middle Ages? Is it true that the mind suffered when it had to serve humanity as a technician, and was it happier to serve as a serf or a slave? I do not intend to belittle the very serious problem of purely mechanical work, of a drudgery which is felt to be meaningless, and which destroys the creative power of the workers; but the only practical hope lies, not in a return to slavery and serfdom, but in an attempt to make machinery take over this mechanical drudgery. Marx was right in insisting that increased productivity is the only reasonable hope of humanizing labour, and of further shortening the labour day. (Besides, I do not think that the mind always suffers when it has to serve humanity as a technician; I suspect that often enough, the 'technicians', including the great inventors and the great scientists, rather enjoyed it, and that they were just as adventurous as the mystics.) And who believes that the 'command and leadership of dreams', as dreamt by our contemporary prophets, dreamers, and leaders, are really 'quite as wise and reliable as intellectual wisdom and scientific programmes'? But we need only turn to the 'myth of revolution', etc., in order to see more clearly what we are facing here. It is a typical expression of the romantic hysteria and the radicalism produced by the dissolution of the tribe and by the strain of civilization (as I have described it in chapter 10). This kind of 'Christianity' which recommends the creation of myth as a substitute for Christian responsibility is a tribal Christianity. It is a Christianity that refuses to carry the cross of being human. Beware of these false prophets! What they are after, without being aware of it, is the lost unity of tribalism. And the return to the closed society which they advocate is the return to the cage, and to the beasts. 24It may be useful to consider how the adherents of this kind of romanticism are likely to react to such criticism. Arguments will hardly be offered; since it is impossible to discuss such profundities with a rationalist, the most likely reaction will be a high-handed withdrawal, combined with the assertion that there is no language common to those whose souls have not yet regained their mystical faculties', and those whose souls possess such faculties. Now this reaction is analogous to that of the psychoanalyst (mentioned in the last chapter) who defeats his opponents not by replying to their arguments but by pointing out that their repressions prevent them from accepting psycho-analysis. It is analogous also to that of the socio-analyst who points out that the total ideologies of his opponents prevent them from accepting the sociology of knowledge. This method, as I admitted before, is good fun for those who practise it. But we can see here more clearly that it must lead to the irrational division of men into those who are near to us and those who are far from us. This division is present in every religion, but it is comparatively harmless in Mohammedanism, Christianity, or the rationalist faith, which all see in every man a potential convert, and the same may be said of psycho-analysis, which sees in every man a potential object of treatment (only that in the last case the fee for conversion constitutes a serious obstacle). But the division is getting less harmless when we proceed to the sociology of knowledge. The socio-analyst claims that only certain intellectuals can get rid of their total ideology, can be freed from 'thinking with their class'; he thus gives up the idea of a potential rational unity of man, and delivers himself body and soul to irrationalism. And this situation gets very much worse when we proceed to the biological or naturalist version of this theory, to the racial doctrine that we 'think with our blood' or that we 'think with our race'. But at least as dangerous, since more subtle, is the same idea when it appears in the cloak of a religious mysticism; not in the mysticism of the poet or musician, but in that of the Hegelian intellectualist who persuades himself and his followers that their thoughts are endowed, because of special grace, with 'mystical and religious faculties' not possessed by others, and who thus claim that they 'think by God's grace'. This claim with its gentle allusion to those who do not possess God's grace, this attack upon the potential spiritual unity of mankind, is, in my opinion, as pretentious, blasphemous and anti-Christian, as it believes itself to be humble, pious, and Christian. As opposed to the intellectual irresponsibility of a mysticism which escapes into dreams and of an oracular philosophy which escapes into verbiage, modern science enforces upon our intellect the discipline of practical tests. Scientific theories can be tested by their practical consequences. The scientist, in his own field, is responsible for what he says; you can know him by his fruits, and thus distinguish him from the false prophets. One of the few who have appreciated this aspect of 25science is the Christian philosopher J.

Macmurray (with whose views on historical prophecy I widely disagree, as will be seen in the next chapter) : 'Science itself, he says , 'in its own specific 26fields of research, employs a method of understanding which restores the broken integrity of theory and practice.' This, I believe, is why science is such an offence in the eyes of mysticism, which evades practice by creating myths instead. 'Science, in its own field,' says Macmurray in another place, 'is the product of Christianity, and its most adequate expression so far; its capacity for co-operative progress, which knows no frontiers of race or nationality or sex, its ability to predict, and its ability to control, are the fullest manifestations of Christianity that Europe has yet seen.' I fully agree with this, for I too believe that our Western civilization owes its rationalism, its faith in the rational unity of man and in the open society, and especially its scientific outlook, to the ancient Socratic and Christian belief in the brotherhood of all men, and in intellectual honesty and responsibility. (A frequent argument against the morality of science is that many of its fruits have been used for bad purposes, for instance, in war. But this argument hardly deserves serious consideration. There is nothing under the sun which cannot be misused, and which has not been misused. Even love can be made an instrument of murder; and pacifism can be made one of the weapons of an aggressive war. On the other hand, it is only too obvious that it is irrationalism and not rationalism that has the responsibility for all national hostility and aggression. There have been only too many aggressive religious wars, both before and after the Crusades, but I do not know of any war waged for a 'scientific' aim, and inspired by scientists.) It will have been observed that in the passages quoted, Macmurray emphasizes that what he appreciates is science 'in its own specific fields of research'. I think that this emphasis is particularly valuable. For nowadays one often hears, usually in connection with the mysticism of Eddington and Jeans, that modern science, as opposed to that of the nineteenth century, has become more humble, in that, it now recognizes the mysteries of this world. But this opinion, I believe, is entirely on the wrong track. Darwin and Faraday, for instance, sought for truth as humbly as anybody, and I do not doubt that they were much more humble than the two great contemporary astronomers mentioned. For great as these are 'in their own specific fields of research', they do not, I believe, prove their humility by extending their activities to the field of philosophical mysticism. Speaking more generally, 27however, it may indeed be the case that scientists are becoming more humble, since the progress of science is largely by way of the discovery of errors, and since, in general, the more we know, the more clearly we realize what we do not know. (The spirit of science is that of Socrates.) 28Although I am mainly concerned with the moral aspect of the conflict between rationalism and irrationalism, I feel that I should briefly touch upon a more 'philosophical' aspect of the problem; but I wish to make it clear that I consider this aspect as of minor importance here. What I have in mind is the fact that the critical rationalist can turn the tables upon the irrationalist in another way as well. He may contend that the irrationalist who prides himself on his respect for the more profound mysteries of the world and his understanding of them (as opposed to the scientist who just scratches its surface) in fact neither respects nor understands its mysteries, but satisfies himself with cheap rationalizations. For what is a myth if not an attempt to rationalize the irrational? And who shows greater reverence for mystery, the scientist who devotes himself to discovering it step by step, always ready to submit to facts, and always aware that even his boldest achievement will never be more than a stepping-stone for those who come after him, or the mystic who is free to maintain anything because he need not fear any test? But in spite of this dubious freedom, the mystics endlessly repeat the same thing. (It is always the myth of the lost tribal paradise, the hysterical refusal to carry the cross of civilization.) All mystics, as F. Kafka, the mystical 29poet, wrote in despair, 'set out to say ... that the incomprehensible 30is incomprehensible, and that we knew before'. And the irrationalist not only tries to rationalize what cannot be rationalized, but he also gets hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether. For it is the particular, the unique and concrete individual, which cannot be approached by rational methods, and not the abstract universal. Science can describe general types of landscape, for example, or of man, but it can never exhaust one single individual landscape, or one single individual man. The universal, the typical, is not only the domain of reason, but it is also largely the product of reason, in so far as it is the product of scientific abstraction. But the unique individual and his unique actions and experiences and relations to other

individuals can never be fully rationalized. And it appears to be just this <sup>31</sup>irrational realm of unique individuality which makes human relations important. Most people would feel, for example, that what makes their lives worth living would largely be destroyed if they themselves, and their lives, were in no sense unique but in all and every respect typical of a class of people, so that they repeated exactly all the actions and experiences of all other men who belong to this class. It is the uniqueness of our experiences which, in this sense, makes our lives worth living, the unique experience of a landscape, of a sunset, of the expression of a human face. But since the day of Plato, it has been a characteristic of all mysticism that it transfers this feeling of the irrationality of the unique individual, and of our unique relations to individuals, to a different field, namely, to the field of abstract universals, a field which properly belongs to the province of science. That it is this feeling which the mystic tries to transfer can hardly be doubted. It is well known that the terminology of mysticism, the mystical union, the mystical intuition of beauty, the mystical love, have in all times been borrowed from the realm of relations between individual men, and especially from the experience of sexual love. Nor can it be doubted that this feeling is transferred by mysticism to the abstract universals, to the essences, to the Forms or Ideas. It is again the lost unity of the tribe, the wish to return into the shelter of a patriarchal home and to make its limits the limits of our world, which stands behind this mystical attitude. 'The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling', says <sup>32</sup>Wittgenstein. But this holistic and universalistic irrationalism is misplaced. The 'world' and the 'whole' and 'nature', all these are abstractions and products of our reason. (This makes the difference between the mystical philosopher and the artist who does not rationalize, who does not use abstractions, but who creates, in his imagination, concrete individuals and unique experiences.) To sum up, mysticism attempts to rationalize the irrational, and at the same time it seeks the mystery in the wrong place; and it does so because it dreams of the collective, and the union of the elect, <sup>33</sup>since it dares not face the hard and practical tasks which those must face who realize that every individual is an end in himself. The nineteenth-century conflict between science and religion appears to me to be superseded. Since an 'uncritical' rationalism <sup>34</sup>is inconsistent, the problem cannot be the choice between knowledge and faith, but only between two kinds of faith. The new problem is: which is the right faith and which is the wrong faith? What I have tried to show is that the choice with which we are confronted is between a faith in reason and in human individuals and a faith in the mystical faculties of man by which he is united to a collective; and that this choice is at the same time a choice between an attitude that recognizes the unity of mankind and an attitude that divides men into friends and foes, into masters and slaves. Enough has been said, for the present purpose, to explain the terms 'rationalism' and 'irrationalism', as well as my motives in deciding in favour of rationalism, and the reason why I see in the irrational and mystical intellectualism which is at present so fashionable the subtle intellectual disease of our time. It is a disease which need not be taken too seriously, and it is not more than skin-deep. (Scientists, with very few exceptions, are particularly free from it.) But in spite of its superficiality, it is a dangerous disease, because of its influence in the field of social and political thought.

V

In order to illustrate the danger, I shall briefly criticize two of the most influential irrationalist authorities of our time. The first of them is A. N. Whitehead, famous for his work in mathematics, and for his collaboration with the greatest contemporary rationalist philosopher, Bertrand Russell. Whitehead considers himself a <sup>35</sup>rationalist philosopher too; but so did Hegel, to whom Whitehead owes a great deal; indeed, he is one of the few Neo-Hegelians who know how much they owe to Hegel (as well as to Aristotle). <sup>36</sup>Undoubtedly, he owes it to Hegel that he has the courage, in spite of Kant's burning protest, to build up grandiose metaphysical systems with a royal contempt for argument. Let us consider first one of the few rational arguments offered by Whitehead in his *Process and Reality*, the argument by which he defends his speculative philosophical method (a method which he calls 'rationalism'). 'It has been an objection to speculative philosophy', he writes, 'that it is over-ambitious. Rationalism, it <sup>37</sup>is admitted, is the method by

which advance is made within the limits of particular sciences. It is, however, held that this limited success must not encourage attempts to frame ambitious schemes expressive of the general nature of things. One alleged justification of this criticism is ill-success; European thought is represented as littered with metaphysical problems, abandoned and unreconciled... (But) *the same criterion would fasten ill-success upon science*. We no more retain the physics of the seventeenth century than we do the Cartesian philosophy of the century... The proper test is not that of finality, but of progress.' Now this is in itself certainly a perfectly reasonable and even plausible argument; but is it valid? The obvious objection against it is that while physics progresses, metaphysics does not. In physics, there is a 'proper test of progress', namely the test of experiment, of practice. We can say why modern physics is better than the physics of the seventeenth century. Modern physics stands up to a great number of practical tests which utterly defeat the older systems. And the obvious objection against speculative metaphysical systems is that the progress they claim seems to be just as imaginary as anything else about them. This objection is very old; it dates back to Bacon, Hume, and Kant. We read, for example, in Kant's *Prolegomena*, 38<sup>th</sup> the following remarks concerning the alleged progress of metaphysics: 'Undoubtedly there are many who, like myself, have been unable to find that this science has progressed by so much as a finger-breadth in spite of so many beautiful things which have long been published on this subject. Admittedly, we may find an attempt to sharpen a definition, or to supply a lame proof with new crutches, and thus to patch up the crazy quilt of metaphysics, or to give it a new pattern; but this is not what the world needs. We are sick of metaphysical assertions. We want to have definite criteria by which we may distinguish dialectical fancies... from truth.' Whitehead is probably aware of this classical and obvious objection; and it looks as if he remembers it when in the sentence following the one quoted last he writes: 'But the main objection dating from the sixteenth century and receiving final expression from Francis Bacon, is the uselessness of philosophic speculation.' Since it was the experimental and practical uselessness of philosophy to which Bacon objected, it looks as if Whitehead here had our point in mind. But he does not follow it up. He does not reply to the obvious objection that this practical uselessness destroys his point that speculative philosophy, like science, is justified by the progress it makes. Instead, he contents himself with switching over to an entirely different problem, namely, the well-known problem 'that there are no brute, self-contained matters of fact', and that all science must make use of thought, since it must generalize, and interpret, the facts. On this consideration he bases his defence of metaphysical systems: 'Thus the understanding of the immediate brute fact requires its metaphysical interpretation ...' Now this may be so, or it may not be so. But it is certainly an entirely different argument from the one he began with. 'The proper test is ... progress', in science as well as in philosophy: this is what we originally heard from Whitehead. But no answer to Kant's obvious objection is forthcoming. Instead, Whitehead's argument, once on the track of the problem of universality and generality, wanders off to such questions as the (Platonic) collectivist theory of morality: 'Morality of outlook is 39 inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook. The antithesis between the general good and the individual interest can be abolished only when the individual is such that its interest is the general good ...' Now this was a sample of rational argument. But rational arguments are rare indeed. Whitehead has learned from Hegel how to avoid Kant's criticism that speculative philosophy only supplies new crutches for lame proofs. This Hegelian method is simple enough. We can easily avoid crutches as long as we avoid proofs and arguments altogether. Hegelian philosophy does not argue; it decrees. It must be admitted that, as opposed to Hegel, Whitehead does not pretend to offer the final truth. He is not a dogmatic philosopher in the sense that he presents his philosophy as an indisputable dogma; he even emphasizes its imperfections. But like all Neo-Hegelians, he adopts the dogmatic method of laying down his philosophy without argument. We can take it or leave it. But we cannot discuss it. (We are indeed faced with 'brute facts'; not with Baconian brute facts of experience, but with the brute facts of a man's metaphysical inspiration.) In order to illustrate this 'method of take it or leave it', I shall quote just one passage from *Process and Reality*; but I must warn my readers that, although I have tried to select the passage fairly, they should not form an opinion without reading the book itself. Its last part, entitled 'Final Interpretations', consists of two chapters, 'The Ideal Opposites' (where, for instance, 'Permanence and Flux'

occurs, a well-known patch from Plato's system; we have dealt with it under the name 'Change and Rest'), and 'God and the World'. I quote from this latter chapter. The passage is introduced by the two sentences: 'The final summary can only be expressed in terms of a group of antitheses, whose apparent self-contradiction depends on neglect of the diverse categories of existence. In each antithesis there is a shift of meaning which converts the opposition into a contrast.' This is the introduction. It prepares us for an 'apparent contradiction', and tells us that this 'depends' on some neglect. This seems to indicate that by avoiding that neglect we may avoid the contradiction. But how this is to be achieved, or what is, more precisely, in the author's mind, we are not told. We have just to take it or leave it. Now I quote the first two of the announced 'antitheses' or 'apparent self-contradictions' which are also stated without a shadow of argument: 'It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent as that the World is permanent and God fluent.—It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.' Now I am not going to criticize these echoes of Greek philosophical fancies; we may indeed take it for granted that the one is just 'as true' as the other. But we have been promised an 'apparent self-contradiction'; and I should like to know where a self-contradiction appears here. For to me not even the appearance of a contradiction is apparent. A self-contradiction would be, for instance, the sentence: 'Plato is happy and Plato is not happy', and all the sentences of the same 'logical form' (that is to say, all sentences obtained from the foregoing by substituting a proper name for 'Plato' and a property word for 'happy'). But the following sentence is clearly not a contradiction: 'It is as true to say that Plato is happy to-day as it is to say that he is unhappy to-day' (for since Plato is dead, the one is indeed 'as true' as the other); and no other sentence of the same or a similar form can be called self-contradictory, even if it happens to be false. This is only to indicate why I am at a loss as to this purely logical aspect of the matter, the 'apparent self-contradictions'. And I feel that way about the whole book. I just do not understand what its author wished it to convey. Very likely, this is my fault and not his. I do not belong to the number of the elect, and I fear that many others are in the same position. This is just why I claim that the method of the book is irrational. It divides mankind into two parts, a small number of the elect, and the large number of the lost. But lost as I am, I can only say that, as I see it, Neo-Hegelianism no longer looks like that old crazy quilt with a few new patches, so vividly described by Kant; rather it looks now like a bundle of a few old patches which have been torn from it. I leave it to the careful student of Whitehead's book to decide whether it has stood up to its own 'proper test', whether it shows progress as compared with the metaphysical systems of whose stagnation Kant complained; provided he can find the criteria by which to judge such progress. And I will leave it to the same student to judge the appropriateness of concluding these remarks with another of Kant's comments upon metaphysics: 41 'Concerning metaphysics in general, and the views I have expressed on their value, I admit that my formulations may here or there have been insufficiently conditional and cautious. Yet I do not wish to hide the fact that I can only look with repugnance and even with something like hate upon the puffed-up pretentiousness of all these volumes filled with wisdom, such as are fashionable nowadays. For I am fully satisfied that the wrong way has been chosen; that the accepted methods must endlessly increase these follies and blunders; and that even the complete annihilation of all these fanciful achievements could not possibly be as harmful as this fictitious science with its accursed fertility.' The second example of contemporary irrationalism with which I intend to deal here is A. J. Toynbee's *A Study of History*. I wish to make it clear that I consider this a most remarkable and interesting book, and that I have chosen it because of its superiority to all other contemporary irrationalist and historicist works I know of. I am not competent to judge Toynbee's merits as a historian. But as opposed to other contemporary historicist and irrationalist philosophers, he has much to say that is most stimulating and challenging; I at least have found him so, and I owe to him many valuable suggestions. I do not accuse him of irrationalism in his own field of historical research. For where it is a question of comparing evidence in favour of or against a certain historical interpretation, he uses unhesitatingly a fundamentally rational method of argument. I have in mind, for instance, his comparative study of the authenticity of the Gospels as historical records, with its negative results; although I am not able to judge his evidence, 42the rationality of the method is beyond question, and this is the more

admirable as Toynbee's general sympathies with Christian orthodoxy might have made it hard for him to defend a view which, to say the least, is unorthodox. I also agree with many of the political tendencies expressed in his work, and most emphatically with his attack upon modern nationalism, and the tribalist and 'archaist', i.e. culturally reactionary tendencies, which are connected with it. The reason why, in spite of all this, I single out Toynbee's monumental historicist work in order to charge it with irrationality, is that only when we see the effects of this poison in a work of such merit do we fully appreciate its danger. What I must describe as Toynbee's irrationalism expresses itself in various ways. One of them is that he yields to a widespread and dangerous fashion of our time. I mean the fashion of not taking arguments seriously, and at their face value, at least tentatively, but of seeing in them nothing but a way in which deeper irrational motives and tendencies express themselves. It is the attitude of socio-analysis, criticized in the last chapter; the attitude of looking at once for the unconscious motives and determinants in the social habitat of the thinker, instead of first examining the validity of the argument itself. This attitude may be justified to a certain extent, as I have tried to show in the two previous chapters; and this is especially so in the case of an author who does not offer any arguments, or whose arguments are obviously not worth looking into. But if no attempt is made to take serious arguments seriously, then I believe that we are justified in making the charge of irrationalism; and we are even justified in retaliating, by adopting the same attitude towards the procedure. Thus I think that we have every right to make the socio-analytical diagnosis that Toynbee's neglect to take serious arguments seriously is representative of a twentieth-century intellectualism which expresses its disillusionment, or even despair, of reason, and of a rational solution of our social problems, by an escape into a religious mysticism. 44As an example of the refusal to take serious arguments seriously, I select Toynbee's treatment of Marx. My reasons for this selection are the following. First, it is a topic which is familiar to myself as well as to the reader of this book. Secondly, it is a topic on which I agree with Toynbee in most of its practical aspects. His main judgements on Marx's political and historical influence are very similar to results at which I have arrived by more pedestrian methods; and it is indeed one of the topics whose treatment shows his great historical intuition. Thus I shall hardly be suspected of being an apologist for Marx if I defend Marx's rationality against Toynbee. For this is the point on which I disagree: Toynbee treats Marx (as he treats everybody) not as a rational being, a man who offers arguments for what he teaches. Indeed, the treatment of Marx, and of his theories, only exemplifies the general impression conveyed by Toynbee's work that arguments are an unimportant mode of speech, and that the history of mankind is a history of emotions, passions, religions, irrational philosophies, and perhaps of art and poetry; but that it has nothing whatever to do with the history of human reason or of human science. (Names like Galileo and Newton, Harvey and Pasteur, do not play any part in the first six volumes of 45Toynbee's historicist study of the life-cycle of civilizations.) Regarding the points of similarity between Toynbee's and my general views of Marx, I may remind the reader of my allusions, in chapter 1, to the analogy between the chosen people and the chosen class; and in various other places, I have commented critically upon Marx's doctrines of historical necessity, and especially of the inevitability of the social revolution. These ideas are linked together by Toynbee with his usual brilliance: 'The distinctively Jewish ... inspiration of Marxism', he writes, 'is the 46apocalyptic vision of a violent revolution which is inevitable because it is the decree .. Of God himself, and which is to invert the present roles of Proletariat and Dominant Minority in... A reversal of roles which is to carry the Chosen People, at one bound, from the lowest to the highest place in the Kingdom of This World. Marx has taken the Goddess "Historical Necessity" in place of Yahweh for his omnipotent deity, and the internal proletariat of the modern Western World in place of Jewry; and his Messianic Kingdom is conceived as a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. But the salient features of the traditional Jewish apocalypse protrude through this threadbare disguise, and it is actually the pre-Rabbinical Maccabean Judaism that our philosopher-impresario is presenting in modern Western costume...' Now there is certainly not much in this brilliantly phrased passage with which I do not agree, as long as it is intended as nothing more than an interesting analogy. But if it is intended as a serious analysis (or part of it) of Marxism, then I must protest; Marx, after all, wrote *Capital*, studied *laissez faire* capitalism, and made serious and most important contributions to social science, even if much of them has

been superseded. And, indeed, Toynbee's passage is intended as a serious analysis; he believes that his analogies and allegories contribute to a serious appreciation of Marx; for in an Annex to this passage (from which I have quoted only an important part) he treats, under the title 'Marxism, Socialism, and Christianity',<sup>47</sup> what he considers to be likely objections of a Marxist to this 'account of the Marxian Philosophy'. This Annex itself is also undoubtedly intended as a serious discussion of Marxism, as can be seen by the fact that its first paragraph commences with the words 'The advocates of Marxism will perhaps protest that ..' and the second with the words: 'In attempting to reply to a Marxian protest on such lines as these ..' But if we look more closely into this discussion, then we find that none of the rational arguments or claims of Marxism is even mentioned, let alone examined. Of Marx's theories and of the question whether they are true or false we do not hear a word. The one additional problem raised in the Annex is again one of historical origin; for the opponent envisaged by Toynbee does not protest, as any Marxist in his senses would, that it is Marx's claim to have based an old idea, socialism, upon a new, namely a rational and scientific, basis; instead, he 'protests' (I am quoting Toynbee) 'that in a rather summary account of Marxian Philosophy .. we have made a show of analysing this into a Hegelian and a Jewish and a Christian constituent element without having said a word about the most characteristic .. part of Marx's message ... Socialism, the Marxian will tell us, is the essence of the Marxian way of life; *it is an original element in the Marxian system which cannot be traced to a Hegelian or a Christian or a Jewish or any other pre-Marxian source*'. This is the protest put by Toynbee into the mouth of a Marxist, although any Marxist, even if he has read nothing but the *Manifesto*, must know that Marx himself as early as in 1847 distinguished about seven or eight different 'pre-Marxian sources' of socialism, and among them also those which he labelled 'Clerical' or 'Christian' socialism, and that he never dreamt of having discovered socialism, but only claimed that he had made it rational; or, as Engels expresses it, that he had developed socialism from a Utopian idea into a science. But Toynbee neglects all that. 'In<sup>48</sup> attempting', he writes, 'to reply to a Marxian protest on such lines as these, we shall readily admit the humaneness and constructiveness of the ideal for which socialism stands, as well as the importance of the part which this ideal plays in the Marxian "ideology"; but we shall find ourselves unable to accept *the Marxian contention that Socialism is Marx's original discovery*. We shall have to point out, on our part, that there is a Christian socialism which was practised as well as preached before the Marxian Socialism was ever heard of; and, when our turn comes for taking the offensive, we shall .. maintain that the Marxian Socialism is derived from the Christian tradition ..' Now I would certainly never deny this derivation, and it is quite clear that every Marxist could admit it without sacrificing the tiniest bit of his creed; for the Marxist creed is not that Marx was the inventor of a humane and constructive ideal but that he was the scientist who by purely rational means showed that socialism will come, and in what way it will come. How, I ask, can it be explained that Toynbee discusses Marxism on lines which have nothing whatever to do with its rational claims? The only explanation I can see is that the Marxist claim to rationality has no meaning whatever for Toynbee. He is interested only in the question of how it originated as a religion. Now I should be the last to deny its religious character. But the method of treating philosophies or religions entirely from the point of view of their historical origin and environment, an attitude described in the previous chapters as *historism* (and to be distinguished from historicism), is, to say the least, very one-sided; and how much this method is liable to produce irrationalism can be seen from Toynbee's neglect of, if not contempt for, that important realm of human life which we have here described as rational. In an assessment of Marx's influence, Toynbee arrives at the conclusion that 'the verdict of History may turn out to be that a<sup>49</sup> re-awakening of the Christian social conscience has been the one great positive achievement of Karl Marx'. Against this assessment, I have certainly not much to say; perhaps the reader will remember that I too have emphasized Marx's moral influence upon<sup>50</sup> Christianity. I do not think that, as a final appraisal, Toynbee takes sufficiently into account the great moral idea that the exploited should emancipate themselves, instead of waiting for acts of charity on the part of the exploiters; but this, of course, is just a difference of opinion, and I would not dream of contesting Toynbee's right to his own opinion, which I consider very fair. But I should like to draw attention to the phrase 'the verdict of history may turn out', with its implied historicist moral theory, and even moral futurism. For I hold that we

cannot and must not evade<sup>51</sup> deciding in such matters for ourselves; and that if we are not able to pass a verdict, neither will history. So much about Toynbee's treatment of Marx. Concerning the more general problem of his historicism or historical relativism, it may be said that he is well aware of it, although he does not formulate it as a general principle of the historical determination of *all* thought, but only as a restricted principle applicable to *historical* thought; for he explains that he takes 'as the starting<sup>52</sup> point .. the axiom that all historical thought is inevitably relative to the particular circumstances of the thinker's own time and place. This is a law of Human Nature from which no human genius can be exempt.' The analogy of this historicism with the sociology of knowledge is rather obvious; for 'the thinker's own time and place' is clearly nothing but the description of what may be called his 'historical habitat', by analogy with the 'social habitat' described by the sociology of knowledge. The difference, if any, is that Toynbee confines his 'law of Human Nature' to historical thought, which seems to me a slightly strange and perhaps even unintentional restriction; for it is somewhat improbable that there should be a 'law of Human Nature from which no human genius can be exempt' holding not for thought in general but only for historical thought. With the undeniable but rather trivial kernel of truth contained in such a historicism or sociologism I have dealt in the last two chapters, and I need not repeat what I have said there. But as regards criticism, it may be worthwhile to point out that Toynbee's sentence, if freed from its restriction to historical thought, could hardly be considered an 'axiom' since it would be paradoxical. (It would be another form of the paradox of the liar; <sup>53</sup>for if no genius is exempt from expressing the fashions of his social habitat then this contention itself may be merely an expression of the fashion of its author's social habitat, i.e. of the relativistic fashion of our own day.) This remark has not only a formal-logical significance. For it indicates that historicism or historic-analysis can be applied to historicism itself, and this is indeed a permissible way of dealing with an idea *after* it has been criticized by way of rational argument. Since historicism has been so criticized, I may now risk a historic-analytical diagnosis, and say that historicism is a typical though slightly obsolescent product of our time; or more precisely, of the typical backwardness of the social sciences of our time. It is the typical reaction to interventionism and to a period of rationalization and industrial co-operation; a period which, perhaps more than any other in history, demands the practical application of rational methods to social problems. A social science which cannot quite meet these demands is therefore inclined to defend itself by producing elaborate attacks upon the applicability of science to such problems. Summing up my historio-analytical diagnosis, I venture to suggest that Toynbee's historicism is an apologetic anti-rationalism, born out of despair of reason, and trying to escape into the past, as well as into prophecy of the future. If anything then historicism must be <sup>54</sup>understood as an historical product. This diagnosis is corroborated by many features of Toynbee's work. An example is his stress upon the superiority of other-worldliness over action which will influence the course of this world. So he speaks, for instance, of Mohammed's 'tragic worldly success', saying that the opportunity which offered itself to the prophet of taking action in this world was 'a challenge to which his spirit failed to rise. In accepting .. he was renouncing the sublime role of the nobly-honoured prophet and contenting himself with the commonplace role of the magnificently successful statesman.' (In other words, Mohammed succumbed to a temptation which Jesus resisted.) Ignatius Loyola, accordingly, wins Toynbee's approval for turning from a soldier into a saint. One may ask, however, whether this saint did not <sup>55</sup>become a successful statesman too? (But if it is a question of Jesuitism, then, it seems, all is different: this form of statesmanship is sufficiently other-worldly.) In order to avoid misunderstandings, I wish to make it clear that I myself would rate many saints higher than most, or very nearly all, statesmen I know of, for I am generally not impressed by political success. I quote this passage only as a corroboration of my historio-analytical diagnosis: that this historicism of a modern historical prophet is a philosophy of escape. Toynbee's anti-rationalism is prominent in many other places. For instance, in an attack upon the rationalistic conception of tolerance he uses categories like 'nobleness' as opposed to 'lowness' instead of arguments. The passage deals with the opposition between the merely 'negative' avoidance of violence, on rational grounds, and the true non-violence of other-worldliness, hinting that these two are instances of 'meanings .. which are .. positively antithetical to one another'. Here is the <sup>56</sup>passage I have in mind: 'At its lowest the practice of

Non-Violence may express nothing more noble and more constructive than a cynical disillusionment with .. violence .. previously practised *ad nauseam* ... A notorious example of Non-Violence of this unedifying kind is the religious tolerance in the Western World from the seventeenth century .. down to our day.' It is difficult to resist the temptation to retaliate by asking—using Toynbee's own terminology—whether this edifying attack upon Western democratic religious tolerance expresses anything more noble or more constructive than a cynical disillusionment with reason; whether it is not a notorious example of that anti-rationalism which has been, and unfortunately still is, fashionable in our Western World, and which has been practised *ad nauseam*, especially from the time of Hegel, down to our day? Of course, my historio-analysis of Toynbee is not a serious criticism. It is only an unkind way of retaliating, of paying historicism back in its own coin. My fundamental criticism is on very different lines, and I should certainly be sorry if by dabbling in historicism I were to become responsible for making this cheap method more fashionable than it is already. I do not wish to be misunderstood. I feel no hostility towards religious mysticism (only towards a militant anti-rationalist intellectualism) and I should be the first to fight any attempt to oppress it. It is not I who advocate religious intolerance. But I claim that faith in reason, or rationalism, or humanitarianism, or humanism, has the same right as any other creed to contribute to an improvement of human affairs, and especially to the control of international crime and the establishment of peace. 'The humanist', Toynbee writes, 'purposely concentrates all his attention and 57effort upon .. bringing human affairs under human control. Yet .. the unity of mankind can never be established in fact except within a framework of the unity of the superhuman whole of which Humanity is a part ..; and our Modern Western school of humanists have been peculiar, as well as perverse, in planning to reach Heaven by raising a titanic Tower of Babel on terrestrial foundations ..' Toynbee's contention, if I understand him rightly, is that there is no chance for the humanist to bring international affairs under the control of human reason. Appealing to the authority of Bergson, he claims that only allegiance to a 58superhuman whole can save us, and that there is no way for human reason, no 'terrestrial road', as he puts it, by which tribal nationalism can be superseded. Now I do not mind the characterization of the humanist's faith in reason as 'terrestrial', since I believe that it is indeed a principle of rationalist politics that we cannot make heaven on earth. But humanism is, after all, a 59faith which has proved itself in deeds, and which has proved itself as well, perhaps, as any other creed. And although I think, with most humanists, that Christianity, by teaching the fatherhood of God, may make a great contribution to establishing the brotherhood of man, I also think that those who undermine man's faith in reason are unlikely to contribute much to this end.

## **Conclusion**

### **Chapter 25: Has History Any Meaning?**

*I*

In approaching the end of this book, I wish again to remind the reader that these chapters were not intended as anything like a full history of historicism; they are merely scattered marginal notes to such a history, and rather personal notes to boot. That they form, besides, a kind of critical introduction to the philosophy of society and of politics, is closely connected with this character of theirs, for historicism is a social and political and moral (or, shall I say, immoral) philosophy, and it has been as such most influential since the beginning of our civilization. It is therefore hardly possible to comment on its history without discussing the fundamental problems of society, of politics, and of morals. But such a discussion, whether it admits it or not, must always contain a strong personal element. This does not mean that much in this book is purely a matter of opinion; in the few cases where I am explaining my personal proposals or decisions in moral and political matters, I have always made the personal character of the proposal or decision clear. It rather means that the selection of the subject matter treated is a matter of personal choice to a much greater extent than it would be, say, in a scientific treatise. In a way, however, this difference is a matter of

degree. Even a science is not merely a 'body of facts'. It is, at the very least, a collection, and as such it is dependent upon the collector's interests, upon a point of view. In science, this point of view is usually determined by a scientific theory; that is to say, we select from the infinite variety of facts, and from the infinite variety of aspects of facts, those facts and those aspects which are interesting because they are connected with some more or less preconceived scientific theory. A certain school of philosophers of scientific method have concluded from considerations such as these that science always argues in a circle, and 'that we find ourselves chasing our own tails', as Eddington puts it, since we can only get out of our factual experience what we have ourselves put into it, in the form of our theories. But this is not a tenable argument. Although it is, in general, quite true that we select only facts which have a bearing upon some preconceived theory, it is not true that we select only such facts as confirm the theory and, as it were, repeat it; the method of science is rather to look out for facts which may refute the theory. This is what we call testing a theory—to see whether we cannot find a flaw in it. But although the facts are collected with an eye upon the theory, and will confirm it as long as the theory stands up to these tests, they are more than merely a kind of empty repetition of a preconceived theory. They confirm the theory only if they are the results of unsuccessful attempts to overthrow its predictions, and therefore a telling testimony in its favour. So it is, I hold, the possibility of overthrowing it, or its falsifiability, that constitutes the possibility of testing it, and therefore the scientific character of a theory; and the fact that all tests of a theory are attempted falsifications of predictions derived with its help, furnishes the clue to scientific method. This view of scientific method is corroborated by the history of science, which shows that scientific theories are often overthrown by experiments, and that the overthrow of theories is indeed the vehicle of scientific progress. The contention that science is circular cannot be upheld. But one element of this contention remains true; namely, that all scientific descriptions of facts are highly selective, that they always depend upon theories. The situation can be best described by comparison with a searchlight (the 'searchlight theory of science', as I usually call it in contradistinction to the 'bucket theory of the mind'). What the searchlight makes visible will depend upon its position, upon our way of directing it, and upon its intensity, colour, etc.; although it will, of course, also depend very largely upon the things illuminated by it. Similarly, a scientific description will depend, largely, upon our point of view, our interests, which are as a rule connected with the theory or hypothesis we wish to test; although it will also depend upon the facts described. Indeed, the theory or hypothesis could be described as the crystallization of a point of view. For if we attempt to formulate our point of view, then this formulation will, as a rule, be what one sometimes calls a working hypothesis; that is to say, a provisional assumption whose function is to help us to select, and to order, the facts. But we should be clear that there cannot be any theory or hypothesis which is not, in this sense, a working hypothesis, and does not remain one. For no theory is final, and every theory helps us to select and order facts. This selective character of all description makes it in a certain sense 'relative'; but only in the sense that we would offer not this but another description, if our point of view were different. It may also affect our *belief* in the truth of the description; but it does not affect the question of the truth or falsity of the description; truth is not 'relative' in this sense. The reason why all description is selective is, roughly speaking, the infinite wealth and variety of the possible aspects of the facts of our world. In order to describe this infinite wealth, we have at our disposal only a finite number of finite series of words. Thus we may describe as long as we like: our description will always be incomplete, a mere selection, and a small one at that, of the facts which present themselves for description. This shows that it is not only impossible to avoid a selective point of view, but also wholly undesirable to attempt to do so; for if we could do so, we should get not a more 'objective' description, but only a mere heap of entirely unconnected statements. But, of course, a point of view is inevitable; and the naive attempt to avoid it can only lead to self-deception, and to the uncritical application of an unconscious point of view. All this is true, most emphatically, in the case of *historical description*, with its 'infinite subject matter', as Schopenhauer calls it. Thus in history no less than in science, we cannot avoid a point of view; and the belief that we can must lead to self-deception and to lack of critical care. This does not mean, of course, that we are permitted to falsify anything, or to take matters of truth lightly. Any particular historical description of facts will be

simply true or false, however difficult it may be to decide upon its truth or falsity. So far, the position of history is analogous to that of the natural sciences, for example, that of physics. But if we compare the part played by a 'point of view' in history with that played by a 'point of view' in physics, then we find a great difference. In physics, as we have seen, the 'point of view' is usually presented by a physical theory which can be tested by searching for new facts. In history, the matter is not quite so simple.

## II

Let us first consider a little more closely the role of the theories in a natural science such as physics. Here, theories have several connected tasks. They help to unify science, and they help to explain as well as to predict events. Regarding explanation and prediction, I may perhaps quote from one of my own publications : 7 "To give a *causal explanation* of a certain event means to derive deductively a statement (it will be called a *prognosis* ) which describes that event, using as premises of the deduction some *universal laws* together with certain singular or specific sentences which we may call *initial conditions* . For example, we can say that we have given a causal explanation of the breaking of a certain thread if we find that this thread was capable of carrying one pound only, and that a weight of two pounds was put on it. If we analyse this causal explanation, then we find that two different constituents are involved in it. (1) We assume some hypotheses of the character of universal laws of nature; in our case, perhaps : "Whenever a certain thread undergoes a tension exceeding a certain maximum tension which is characteristic for that particular thread, then it will break." (2) We assume some specific statements (the initial conditions) pertaining to the particular event in question; in our case, we may have the two statements : "For this thread, the characteristic maximum tension at which it is liable to break is equal to a one-pound weight" and "The weight put on this thread was a two-pound weight." Thus we have two different kinds of statements which together yield a complete causal explanation, viz. : (1) *universal statements of the character of natural laws* , and (2) *specific statements pertaining to the special case in question, the initial conditions* . Now from the universal laws (1), we can deduce with the help of the initial conditions (2) the following specific statement (3) : "This thread will break." This conclusion (3) we may also call a *specific prognosis* .—The initial conditions (or more precisely, the situation described by them) are usually spoken of as the *cause* of the event in question, and the prognosis (or rather, the event described by the prognosis) as the *effect* : for example, we say that the putting of a weight of two pounds on a thread capable of carrying one pound only was the cause of the breaking of the thread.' From this analysis of causal explanation, we can see several things. One is that we can never speak of cause and effect in an absolute way, but that an event is a cause of another event, which is its effect, relative to some universal law. However, these universal laws are very often so trivial (as in our own example) that as a rule we take them for granted, instead of making conscious use of them. A second point is that the use of a theory for the purpose of *predicting* some specific event is just another aspect of its use for the purpose of *explaining* such an event. And since we test a theory by comparing the events predicted with those actually observed, our analysis also shows how theories can be *tested* . Whether we use a theory for the purpose of explanation, or prediction, or of testing, depends on our interest, and on what propositions we take as given or assumed. Thus in the case of the so-called theoretical or *generalizing sciences* (such as physics, biology, sociology, etc.) we are pre dominantly interested in the universal laws or hypotheses. We wish to know whether they are true, and since we can never directly make sure of their truth, we adopt the method of eliminating the false ones. Our interest in the specific events, for example in experiments which are described by the initial conditions and prognoses, is somewhat limited; we are interested in them mainly as means to certain ends, means by which we can test the universal laws, which latter are considered as interesting in themselves, and as unifying our knowledge. In the case of applied sciences, our interest is different. The engineer who uses physics in order to build a bridge is predominantly interested in a prognosis : whether or not a bridge "of a certain kind described (by the initial conditions) will carry a certain load. For him, the universal laws are means to an end and taken for granted. Accordingly, pure and

applied generalizing sciences are respectively interested in testing universal hypotheses, and in predicting specific events. But there is a further interest, that in explaining a specific or particular event. If we wish to explain such an event, for example, a certain road accident, then we usually tacitly assume a host of rather trivial universal laws (such as that a bone breaks under a certain strain, or that any motor-car colliding in a certain way with any human body will exert a strain sufficient to break a bone, etc.), and are interested, predominantly, in the initial conditions or in the cause which, together with these trivial universal laws, would explain the event in question. We then usually assume certain initial conditions hypothetically, and attempt to find some further evidence in order to find out whether or not these hypothetically assumed initial conditions are true; that is to say, we test these specific hypotheses by deriving from them (with the help of some other and usually equally trivial universal laws) new predictions which can be confronted with observable facts. Very rarely do we find ourselves in the position of having to worry about the universal laws involved in such an explanation. It happens only when we observe some new or strange kind of event, such as an unexpected chemical reaction. If such an event gives rise to the framing and testing of new hypotheses, then it is interesting mainly from the point of view of some generalizing science. But as a rule, if we are interested in specific events and their explanation, we take for granted all the many universal laws which we need. Now the sciences which have this interest in specific events and in their explanation may, in contradistinction to the generalizing sciences, be called the *historical sciences*. This view of history makes it clear why so many students of history and its method insist that it is the particular event that interests them, and not any so-called universal historical laws. For from our point of view, there can be no historical laws. Generalization belongs simply to a different line of interest, sharply to be distinguished from that interest in specific events and their causal explanation which is the business of history. Those who are interested in laws must turn to the generalizing sciences (for example, to sociology). Our view also makes it clear why history has so often been described as 'the events of the past as they actually did happen'. This description brings out quite well the specific interest of the student of history, as opposed to a student of a generalizing science, even though we shall have to raise certain objections against it. And our view explains why, in history, we are confronted, much more than in the generalizing sciences, with the problems of its 'infinite subject matter'. For the theories or universal laws of generalizing science introduce unity as well as a 'point of view'; they create, for every generalizing science, its problems, and its centres of interest as well as of research, of logical construction, and of presentation. But in history we have no such unifying theories; or, rather, the host of trivial universal laws we use are taken for granted; they are practically without interest, and totally unable to bring order into the subject matter. If we explain, for example, the first division of Poland in 1772 by pointing out that it could not possibly resist the combined power of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, then we are tacitly using some trivial universal law such as: 'If of two armies which are about equally well armed and led, one has a tremendous superiority in men, then the other never wins.' (Whether we say here 'never' or 'hardly ever' does not make, for our purposes, as much difference as it does for the Captain of H.M.S. *Pinafore*.) Such a law might be described as a law of the sociology of military power, but it is too trivial ever to raise a serious problem for the students of sociology, or to arouse their attention. Or if we explain Caesar's decision to cross the Rubicon by his ambition and energy say, then we are using some very trivial psychological generalizations which would hardly ever arouse the attention of a psychologist. (As a matter of fact, most historical explanation makes tacit use, not so much of trivial sociological and psychological laws, but of what I have called, in chapter 14, the *logic of the situation*; that is to say, besides the initial conditions describing personal interests, aims, and other situational factors, such as the information available to the person concerned, it tacitly assumes, as a kind of first approximation, the trivial general law that sane persons as a rule act more or less rationally.)

### III

We see, therefore, that those universal laws which historical explanation uses provide no selective and

unifying principle, no 'point of view' for history. In a very limited sense such a point of view may be provided by confining history to a history of something; examples are the history of power politics, or of economic relations, or of technology, or of mathematics. But as a rule, we need further selective principles, points of view which are at the same time centres of interest. Some of these are provided by preconceived ideas which in some way resemble universal laws, such as the idea that what is important for history is the character of the 'Great Men', or the 'national character', or moral ideas, or economic conditions, etc. Now it is important to see that many 'historical theories' (they might perhaps be better described as 'quasi-theories') are in their character vastly different from scientific theories. For in history (including the historical natural sciences such as historical geology) the facts at our disposal are often severely limited and cannot be repeated or implemented at our will. And they have been collected in accordance with a preconceived point of view; the so-called 'sources' of history record only such facts as appeared sufficiently interesting to record, so that the sources will often contain only such facts as fit in with preconceived theory. And if no further facts are available, it will often not be possible to test this theory or any other subsequent theory. Such untestable historical theories can then rightly be charged with being circular in the sense in which this charge has been unjustly brought against scientific theories. I shall call such historical theories, in contradistinction to scientific theories, '*general interpretations*'. Interpretations are important since they represent a point of view. But we have seen that a point of view is always inevitable, and that, in history, a theory which can be tested and which is therefore of scientific character can only rarely be obtained. Thus we must not think that a general interpretation can be confirmed by its agreement even with all our records; for we must remember its circularity, as well as the fact that there will always be a number of other (and perhaps incompatible) interpretations that agree with the same records, and that we can rarely obtain new data able to serve as do crucial experiments in physics. Historians often do not see any other interpretation which fits the facts as well as their own does; but if we consider that even in the field of physics, with its larger and more reliable stock of facts, new crucial experiments are needed again and again because the old ones are all in keeping with both of two competing and incompatible theories (consider the eclipse-experiment which is needed for deciding between Newton's and Einstein's theories of gravitation), then we shall give up the naive belief that any definite set of historical records can ever be interpreted in one way only. But this does not mean, of course, that all interpretations are of equal merit. First, there are always interpretations which are not really in keeping with the accepted records; secondly, there are some which need a number of more or less plausible auxiliary hypotheses if they are to escape falsification by the records; next, there are some that are unable to connect a number of facts which another interpretation can connect, and in so far 'explain'. There may accordingly be a considerable amount of progress even within the field of historical interpretation. Furthermore, there may be all kinds of intermediate stages between more or less universal 'points of view' and those specific or singular historical hypotheses mentioned above, which in the explanation of historical events play the role of hypothetical initial conditions rather than of universal laws. Often enough, these can be tested fairly well and are therefore comparable to scientific theories. But some of these specific hypotheses closely resemble those universal quasi-theories which I have called interpretations, and may accordingly be classed with these, as '*specific interpretations*'. For the evidence in favour of such a specific interpretation is often enough just as circular in character as the evidence in favour of some universal 'point of view.' For example, our only authority may give us just that information regarding certain events which fits with his own specific interpretation. Most specific interpretations of these facts we may attempt will then be circular in the sense that they must fit in with that interpretation which was used in the original selection of facts. If, however, we can give to such material an interpretation which radically deviates from that adopted by our authority (and this is certainly so, for example, in our interpretation of Plato's work), then the character of our interpretation may perhaps take on some semblance to that of a scientific hypothesis. But fundamentally, it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that it is a very dubious argument in favour of a certain interpretation that it can be easily applied, and that it explains all we know; for only if we can look out for counter examples can we test a theory. (This point is nearly always overlooked by the admirers of

the various 'unveiling philosophies', especially by the psycho-, socio-, and historio-analysts; they are often seduced by the ease with which their theories can be applied everywhere.) I said before that interpretations may be incompatible; but as long as we consider them merely as crystallizations of points of view, then they are not. For example, the interpretation that man steadily progresses (towards the open society or some other aim) is incompatible with the interpretation that he steadily slips back or retrogresses. But the 'point of view' of one who looks on human history as a history of progress is not necessarily incompatible with that of one who looks on it as a history of retrogression; that is to say, we could write a history of human progress towards freedom (containing, for example, the story of the fight against slavery) and another history of human retrogression and oppression (containing perhaps such things as the impact of the white race upon the coloured races); and these two histories need not be in conflict; rather, they may be complementary to each other, as would be two views of the same landscape seen from two different points. This consideration is of considerable importance. For since each generation has its own troubles and problems, and therefore its own interests and its own point of view, it follows that each generation has a right to look upon and re-interpret history in its own way, which is complementary to that of previous generations. After all, we study history because we are interested in it, and perhaps because we wish to learn something about our own problems. But history can serve neither of these two purposes if, under the influence of an inapplicable idea of objectivity, we hesitate to present historical problems from our point of view. And we should not think that our point of view, if consciously and critically applied to the problem, will be inferior to that of a writer who naively believes that he does not interpret, and that he has reached a level of objectivity permitting him to present 'the events of the past as they actually did happen'. (This is why I believe that even such admittedly personal comments as can be found in this book are justified, since they are in keeping with historical method.) The main thing is to be conscious of one's point of view, and critical, that is to say, to avoid, as far as this is possible, unconscious and therefore uncritical bias in the presentation of the facts. In every other respect, the interpretation must speak for itself; and its merits will be its fertility, its ability to elucidate the facts of history, as well as its topical interest, its ability to elucidate the problems of the day. To sum up, there can be no history of 'the past as it actually did happen'; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own. But not only has it a right to frame its own interpretations, it also has a kind of obligation to do so; for there is indeed a pressing need to be answered. We want to know how our troubles are related to the past, and we want to see the line along which we may progress towards the solution of what we feel, and what we choose, to be our main tasks. It is this need which, if not answered by rational and fair means, produces historicist interpretations. Under its pressure the historicist substitutes for a rational question: 'What are we to choose as our most urgent problems, how did they arise, and along what roads may we proceed to solve them?' the irrational and apparently factual question: 'Which way are we going? What, in essence, is the part that history has destined us to play?' But am I justified in refusing to the historicist the right to interpret history in his own way? Have I not just proclaimed that anybody has such a right? My answer to this question is that historicist interpretations are of a peculiar kind. Those interpretations which are needed, and justified, and one or other of which we are bound to adopt, can, I have said, be compared to a searchlight. We let it play upon our past, and we hope to illuminate the present by its reflection. As opposed to this the historicist interpretation may be compared to a searchlight which we direct upon ourselves. It makes it difficult if not impossible to see anything of our surroundings, and it paralyses our actions. To translate this metaphor, the historicist does not recognize that it is we who select and order the facts of history, but he believes that 'history itself', or the 'history of mankind', determines, by its inherent laws, ourselves, our problems, our future, and even our point of view. Instead of recognizing that historical interpretation should answer a need arising out of the practical problems and decisions which face us, the historicist believes that in our desire for historical interpretation, there expresses itself the profound intuition that by contemplating history we may discover the secret, the essence of human destiny. Historicism is out to find The Path on which mankind is destined to walk; it is out to discover The Clue to History (as J. Macmurray calls it), or

## The Meaning of History.

### IV

But is there such a clue? *Is there a meaning in history?* I do not wish to enter here into the problem of the meaning of 'meaning'; I take it for granted that most people know with sufficient clarity what they mean when they speak of the 'meaning of history' or of the 'meaning or purpose of life'. And in this sense, in the sense in which the question of the meaning of history is asked, I answer: *History has no meaning*. In order to give reasons for this opinion, I must first say something about that 'history' which people have in mind when they ask whether it has meaning. So far, I have myself spoken about 'history' as if it did not need any explanation. That is no longer possible; for I wish to make it clear that '*history*' in the sense in which most people speak of it simply does not exist; and this is at least one reason why I say that it has no meaning. How do most people come to use the term 'history'? (I mean 'history' in the sense in which we say of a book that it is *about* the history of Europe—not in the sense in which we say that it *is* a history of Europe.) They learn about it in school and at the University. They read books about it. They see what is treated in the books under the name 'history of the world' or 'the history of mankind', and they get used to looking upon it as a more or less definite series of facts. And these facts constitute, they believe, the history of mankind. But we have already seen that the realm of facts is infinitely rich, and that there must be selection. According to our interests, we could, for instance, write about the history of art; or of language; or of feeding habits; or of typhus fever (see Zinsser's *Rats, Lice, and History*). Certainly, none of these is the history of mankind (nor all of them taken together). What people have in mind when they speak of the history of mankind is, rather, the history of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires, and so on, down to our own day. In other words: They speak about the *history of mankind*, but what they mean, and what they have learned about in school, is the *history of political power*. There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. And one of these is the history of political power. This is elevated into the history of the world. But this, I hold, is an offence against every decent conception of mankind. It is hardly better than to treat the history of embezzlement or of robbery or of poisoning as the history of mankind. For *the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder* (including, it is true, some of the attempts to suppress them). This history is taught in schools, and some of the greatest criminals are extolled as its heroes. But is there really no such thing as a universal history in the sense of a concrete history of mankind? There can be none. This must be the reply of every humanitarian, I believe, and especially that of every Christian. A concrete history of mankind, if there were any, would have to be the history of all men. It would have to be the history of all human hopes, struggles, and sufferings. For there is no one man more important than any other. Clearly, this concrete history cannot be written. We must make abstractions, we must neglect, select. But with this we arrive at the many histories; and among them, at that history of international crime and mass murder which has been advertised as the history of mankind. But why has just the history of power been selected, and not, for example, that of religion, or of poetry? There are several reasons. One is that power affects us all, and poetry only a few. Another is that men are inclined to worship power. But there can be no doubt that the worship of power is one of the worst kinds of human idolatries, a relic of the time of the cage, of human servitude. The worship of power is born of fear, an emotion which is rightly despised. A third reason why power politics has been made the core of 'history' is that those in power wanted to be worshipped and could enforce their wishes. Many historians wrote under the supervision of the emperors, the generals and the dictators. I know that these views will meet with the strongest opposition from many sides, including some apologists for Christianity; for although there is hardly anything in the New Testament to support this doctrine, it is often considered a part of the Christian dogma that God reveals Himself in history; that history has meaning; and that its meaning is the purpose of God. Historicism is thus held to be a necessary element of religion. But I do not admit this. I contend that this view is pure idolatry and superstition, not only from the point of view of a rationalist or humanist but

from the Christian point of view itself. What is behind this theistic historicism? With Hegel, it looks upon history—political history—as a stage, or rather, as a kind of lengthy Shakespearian play; and the audience conceive either the ‘great historical personalities’, or mankind in the abstract, as the heroes of the play. Then they ask, ‘Who has written this play?’ And they think that they give a pious answer when they reply, ‘God’. But they are mistaken. Their answer is pure blasphemy, for the play was (and they know it) written not by God, but, under the supervision of generals and dictators, by the professors of history. I do not deny that it is as justifiable to interpret history from a Christian point of view as it is to interpret it from any other point of view; and it should certainly be emphasized, for example, how much of our Western aims and ends, humanitarianism, freedom, equality, we owe to the influence of Christianity. But at the same time, the only rational as well as the only Christian attitude even towards the history of freedom is that we are ourselves responsible for it, in the same sense in which we are responsible for what we make of our lives, and that only our conscience can judge us and not our worldly success. The theory that God reveals Himself and His judgement in history is indistinguishable from the theory that worldly success is the ultimate judge and justification of our actions; it comes to the same thing as the doctrine that history will judge, that is to say, that future might is right; it is the same as what I have called ‘moral futurism’. To maintain that God reveals Himself in what is usually called ‘history’, in the history of international crime and of mass murder, is indeed blasphemy; for what really happens within the realm of human lives is hardly ever touched upon by this cruel and at the same time childish affair. The life of the forgotten, of the unknown individual man; his sorrows and his joys, his suffering and death, this is the real content of human experience down the ages. If that could be told by history, then I should certainly not say that it is blasphemy to see the finger of God in it. But such a history does not and cannot exist; and all the history which exists, our history of the Great and the Powerful, is at best a shallow comedy; it is the opera buffa played by the powers behind reality (comparable to Homer’s opera buffa of the Olympian powers behind the scene of human struggles). It is what one of our worst instincts, the idolatrous worship of power, of success, has led us to believe to be real. And in this not even man-made, but man-faked ‘history’, some Christians dare to see the hand of God! They dare to understand and to know what He wills when they impute to Him their petty historical interpretations! ‘On the contrary’, says K. Barth, the theologian, in his *Credo*, ‘we have to begin with the admission .. that all that we think we know when we say “God” does not reach or comprehend Him .., but always one of our self-conceived and self-made idols, whether it is “spirit” or “nature”, “fate” or “idea” ..’ (It is in keeping with this attitude that Barth characterizes the ‘Neo-Protestant doctrine of the revelation of God in history’ as ‘inadmissible’ and as an encroachment upon ‘the kingly office of Christ.’) But it is, from the Christian point of view, not only arrogance that underlies such attempts; it is, more specifically, an anti-Christian attitude. For Christianity teaches, if anything, that worldly success is not decisive. Christ ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’. I am quoting Barth again: ‘How does Pontius Pilate get into the Credo? The simple answer can at once be given: it is a matter of date.’ Thus the man who was successful, who represented the historical power of that time, plays here the purely technical role of indicating when these events happened. And what were these events? They had nothing to do with power-political success, with ‘history’. They were not even the story of an unsuccessful non-violent nationalist revolution ( *a la* Gandhi) of the Jewish people against the Roman conquerors. The events were nothing but the sufferings of a man. Barth insists that the word ‘suffers’ refers to the whole of the life of Christ and not only to His death; he says: ‘Jesus *suffers*. Therefore He does not conquer. He does not triumph. He has no success .. He achieved nothing except .. His crucifixion. The same could be said of His relationship to His people and to His disciples.’ My intention in quoting Barth is to show that it is not only my ‘rationalist’ or ‘humanist’ point of view from which the worship of historical success appears as incompatible with the spirit of Christianity. What matters to Christianity is not the historical deeds of the powerful Roman conquerors but (to use a phrase of Kierkegaard’s) ‘what a few fishermen have given the world’. And yet all theistic interpretation of history attempts to see in history as it is recorded, i.e. in the history of power, and in historical success, the manifestation of God’s will. To this attack upon the ‘doctrine of the revelation of God in history’, it will probably be replied that it is success, His success after

His death, by which Christ's unsuccessful life on earth was finally revealed to mankind as the greatest spiritual victory; that it was the success, the fruits of His teaching which proved it and justified it, and by which the prophecy 'The last shall be first and the first last' has been verified. In other words, that it was the historical success of the Christian Church through which the will of God manifested itself. But this is a most dangerous line of defence. Its implication that the worldly success of the Church is an argument in favour of Christianity clearly reveals lack of faith. The early Christians had no worldly encouragement of this kind. (They believed that conscience must judge power, and not the other way round.) Those who hold that the history of the success of Christian teaching reveals the will of God should ask themselves whether this success was really a success of the spirit of Christianity; and whether this spirit did not triumph at the time when the Church was persecuted, rather than at the time when the Church was triumphant. Which Church incorporated this spirit more purely, that of the martyrs, or the victorious Church of the Inquisition? There seem to be many who would admit much of this, insisting as they do that the message of Christianity is to the meek, but who still believe that this message is one of historicism. An outstanding representative of this view is J. Macmurray, who, in *The Clue to History*, finds the essence of Christian teaching in historical prophecy, and who sees in its founder the discoverer of a dialectical law of human nature'. Macmurray holds that, according to this law, political history must inevitably bring forth 'the socialist commonwealth of the world. The fundamental law of human nature cannot be broken . . . It is the meek who will inherit the earth.' But this historicism, with its substitution of certainty for hope, must lead to a moral futurism. 'The law *cannot* be broken.' So we can be sure, on psychological grounds, that whatever we do will lead to the same result; that even fascism must, in the end, lead to that commonwealth; so that the final outcome does not depend upon our moral decision, and that there is no need to worry over our responsibilities. If we are told that we can be *certain*, on scientific grounds, that 'the last will be first and the first last', what else is this but the substitution of historical prophecy for conscience? Does not this theory come dangerously close (certainly against the intentions of its author) to the admonition : 'Be wise, and take to heart what the founder of Christianity tells you, for he was a great psychologist of human nature and a great prophet of history. Climb in time upon the band-waggon of the meek; for according to the inexorable scientific laws of human nature, this is the surest way to come out on top!' Such a clue to history implies the worship of success; it implies that the meek will be justified because they will be on the winning side. It translates Marxism, and especially what I have described as Marx's historicist moral theory, into the language of a psychology of human nature, and of religious prophecy. It is an interpretation which, by implication, sees the greatest achievement of Christianity in the fact that its founder was a forerunner of Hegel—a superior one, admittedly. My insistence that success should not be worshipped, that it cannot be our judge, and that we should not be dazzled by it, and in particular, my attempts to show that in this attitude I concur with what I believe to be the true teaching of Christianity, should not be misunderstood. They are not intended to support the attitude of 'other-worldliness' which I have criticized in the last chapter. Whether Christianity is other-<sup>7</sup>worldly, I do not know, but it certainly teaches that the only way to prove one's faith is by rendering practical (and worldly) help to those who need it. And it is certainly possible to combine an attitude of the utmost reserve and even of contempt towards worldly success in the sense of power, glory, and wealth, with the attempt to do one's best in this world, and to further the ends one has decided to adopt with the clear purpose of making them succeed; not for the sake of success or of one's justification by history, but for their own sake. A forceful support of some of these views, and especially of the incompatibility of historicism and Christianity, can be found in Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel. Although Kierkegaard never freed himself entirely from the Hegelian tradition in which he was educated, there was hardly anybody who recognized more clearly<sup>18</sup> what Hegelian historicism meant. 'There were', Kierkegaard wrote, 'philosophers who tried, before Hegel, to explain<sup>19</sup> history. And providence could only smile when it saw these attempts. But providence did not laugh outright, for there was a human, honest sincerity about them. But Hegel—! Here I need Homer's language. How did the gods roar with laughter! Such a horrid little professor who has simply seen through the necessity of anything and everything there is, and who now plays the whole affair on his barrel-organ :

listen, ye gods of Olympus!' And Kierkegaard continues, referring to the attack by the atheist Schopenhauer upon the Christian apologist Hegel: 'Reading Schopenhauer has given me more pleasure than I can express. What he says is perfectly true; and then—it serves the Germans right—he is as rude as only a German can be.' But Kierkegaard's own expressions are nearly as blunt as Schopenhauer's; for Kierkegaard goes on to say that Hegelianism, which he calls 'this brilliant spirit of putridity', is the 'most repugnant of all forms of looseness'; and he speaks of its 'mildew of pomposity', its 'intellectual voluptuousness', and its 'infamous splendour of corruption'. And, indeed, our intellectual as well as our ethical education is corrupt. It is perverted by the admiration of brilliance, of the way things are said, which takes the place of a critical appreciation of the things that are said (and the things that are done). It is perverted by the romantic idea of the splendour of the stage of History on which we are the actors. We are educated to act with an eye to the gallery. The whole problem of educating man to a sane appreciation of his own importance relative to that of other individuals is thoroughly muddled by these ethics of fame and fate, by a morality which perpetuates an educational system that is still based upon the classics with their romantic view of the history of power and their romantic tribal morality which goes back to Heraclitus; a system whose ultimate basis is the worship of power. Instead of a sober combination of individualism and altruism (to use these labels again)—that is to say, instead of a position like 'What really matters are human individuals, but I do not take this to mean that it is I who matter very much'—a romantic combination of egoism and collectivism is taken for granted. That is to say, the importance of the self, of its emotional life and its 'self-expression', is romantically exaggerated; and with it, the tension between the 'personality' and the group, the collective. This takes the place of the other individuals, the other men, but does not admit of reasonable personal relations. 'Dominate or submit' is, by implication, the device of this attitude; either be a Great Man, a Hero wrestling with fate and earning fame ('the greater the fall, the greater the fame', says Heraclitus), or belong to 'the masses' and submit yourself to leadership and sacrifice yourself to the higher cause of your collective. There is a neurotic, an hysterical element in this exaggerated stress on the importance of the tension between the self and the collective, and I do not doubt that this hysteria, this reaction to the strain of civilization, is the secret of the strong emotional appeal of the ethics of hero-worship, of the ethics of domination and submission. <sup>22</sup>At the bottom of all this there is a real difficulty. While it is fairly clear (as we have seen in chapters 9 and 24) that the politician should limit himself to fighting against evils, instead of fighting for 'positive' or 'higher' values, such as happiness, etc., the teacher, in principle, is in a different position. Although he should not *impose* his scale of 'higher' values upon his pupils, he certainly should try to *stimulate* their interest in these values. He should care for the souls of his pupils. (When Socrates told his friends to care for their souls, *he* cared for them.) Thus there is certainly something like a romantic or aesthetic element in education, such as should not enter politics. But though this is true in principle, it is hardly applicable to our educational system. For it presupposes a relation of friendship between teacher and pupil, a relation which, as emphasized in chapter 24, each party must be free to end. (Socrates chose his companions, and they him.) The very number of pupils makes all this impossible in our schools. Accordingly, attempts to impose higher values not only become unsuccessful, but it must be insisted that they lead to *harm*—to something much more concrete and public than the ideals aimed at. And the principle that those who are entrusted to us must, before anything else, not be harmed, should be recognized to be just as fundamental for education as it is for medicine. 'Do no harm' (and, therefore, 'give the young what they most urgently need, in order to become independent of us, and to be able to choose for themselves') would be a very worthy aim for our educational system, and one whose realization is somewhat remote, even though it sounds modest. Instead 'higher' aims are the fashion, aims which are typically romantic and indeed nonsensical, such as 'the full development of the personality'. It is under the influence of such romantic ideas that individualism is still identified with egoism, as it was by Plato, and altruism with collectivism (i.e. with the substitution of group egoism for the individualist egoism). But this bars the way even to a clear formulation of the main problem, the problem of how to obtain a sane appreciation of one's own importance in relation to other individuals. Since it is felt, and rightly so, that we have to aim at something beyond our own selves, something to which we can

devote ourselves, and for which we may make sacrifices, it is concluded that this must be the collective, with its 'historical mission'. Thus we are told to make sacrifices, and, at the same time, assured that we shall make an excellent bargain by doing so. We shall make sacrifices, it is said, but we shall thereby obtain honour and fame. We shall become 'leading actors', heroes on the Stage of History; for a small risk we shall gain great rewards. This is the dubious morality of a period in which only a tiny minority counted, and in which nobody cared for the common people. It is the morality of those who, being political or intellectual aristocrats, have a chance of getting into the textbooks of history. It cannot possibly be the morality of those who favour justice and equalitarianism; for historical fame cannot be just, and it can be attained only by a very few. The countless number of men who are just as worthy, or worthier, will always be forgotten. It should perhaps be admitted that the Heraclitean ethics, the doctrine that the higher reward is that which only posterity can offer, may in some way perhaps be slightly superior to an ethical doctrine which teaches us to look out for reward now. But it is not what we need. We need an ethics which defies success and reward. And such an ethics need not be invented. It is not new. It has been taught by Christianity, at least in its beginnings. It is, again, taught by the industrial as well as by the scientific co-operation of our own day. The romantic historicist morality of fame, fortunately, seems to be on the decline. The Unknown Soldier shows it. We are beginning to realize that sacrifice may mean just as much, or even more, when it is made anonymously. Our ethical education must follow suit. We must be taught to do our work; to make our sacrifice for the sake of this work, and not for praise or the avoidance of blame. (The fact that we all need some encouragement, hope, praise, and even blame, is another matter altogether.) We must find our justification in our work, in what we are doing ourselves, and not in a fictitious 'meaning of history'. History has no meaning, I contend. But this contention does not imply that all we can do about it is to look aghast at the history of political power, or that we must look on it as a cruel joke. For we can interpret it, with an eye to those problems of power politics whose solution we choose to attempt in our time. We can interpret the history of power politics from the point of view of our fight for the open society, for a rule of reason, for justice, freedom, equality, and for the control of international crime. Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it; and *although history has no meaning, we can give it a meaning*. It is the problem of nature and convention which we meet here again. Neither nature nor history can tell us what we ought to do. <sup>23</sup>Facts, whether those of nature or those of history, cannot make the decision for us, they cannot determine the ends we are going to choose. It is we who introduce purpose and meaning into nature and into history. Men are not equal; but we can decide to fight for equal rights. Human institutions such as the state are not rational, but we can decide to fight to make them more rational. We ourselves and our ordinary language are, on the whole, emotional rather than rational; but we can try to become a little more rational, and we can train ourselves to use our language as an instrument not of self-expression (as our romantic educationists would say) but of rational communication. History itself—I mean the history of <sup>24</sup>power politics, of course, not the non-existent story of the development of mankind—has no end nor meaning, but we can decide to give it both. We can make it our fight for the open society and against its enemies (who, when in a corner, always protest their humanitarian sentiments, in accordance with Pareto's advice); and we can interpret it accordingly. Ultimately, we may say the same about the 'meaning of life'. It is up to us to decide what shall be our purpose in life, to determine our ends. <sup>25</sup>This dualism of facts and decisions is, I believe, fundamental. <sup>26</sup>Facts as such have no meaning; they can gain it only through our decisions. Historicism is only one of many attempts to get over this dualism; it is born of fear, for it shrinks from realizing that we bear the ultimate responsibility even for the standards we choose. But such an attempt seems to me to represent precisely what is usually described as superstition. For it assumes that we can reap where we have not sown; it tries to persuade us that if we merely fall into step with history everything will and must go right, and that no fundamental decision on our part is required; it tries to shift our responsibility on to history, and thereby on to the play of demoniac powers beyond ourselves; it tries to base our actions upon the hidden intentions of these powers, which can be revealed to us only in mystical inspirations and intuitions; and it thus puts our actions and ourselves on the moral level of a man who, inspired by horoscopes and dreams, chooses his lucky number in a lottery.

27Like gambling, historicism is born of our despair in the rationality and responsibility of our as is a debased hope and actions. It debased faith, an attempt to be hope and the faith that replace springs from our moral enthusiasm and the contempt for success by a certainty that springs from a pseudo-science; a pseudo-science of the stars, or of 'human nature', or of historical destiny. Historicism, I assert, is not only rationally untenable, it is also in conflict with any religion that teaches the importance of conscience. For such a religion must agree with the rationalist attitude towards history in its emphasis on our supreme responsibility for our actions, and for their repercussions upon the course of history. True, we need hope; to act, to live without hope goes beyond our strength. But we do *not* need more, and we must not be given more. We do not need certainty. Religion, in particular, should not be a substitute for dreams and wish-fulfillment; it should resemble neither the holding of a ticket in a lottery, nor the holding of a policy in an insurance company. The historicist element in religion is an element of idolatry, of superstition. This emphasis upon the dualism of facts and decisions determines also our attitude towards such ideas as 'progress'. If we think that history progresses, or that we are bound to progress, then we commit the same mistake as those who believe that history has a meaning that can be discovered in it and need not be given to it. For to progress is to move towards some kind of end, towards an end which exists for us as human beings. 'History' cannot do that; only we, the human individuals, can do it; we can do it by defending and strengthening those democratic institutions upon which freedom, and with it progress, depends. And we shall do it much better as we become more fully aware of the fact that progress rests with us, with our watchfulness, with our efforts, with the clarity of our conception of our ends, and with the realism of their choice. 28Instead of posing as prophets we must become the makers of our fate. We must learn to do things as well as we can, and to look out for our mistakes. And when we have dropped the idea that the history of power will be our judge, when we have given up worrying whether or not history will justify us, then one day perhaps we may succeed in getting power under control. In this way we may even justify history, in our turn. It badly needs a justification.