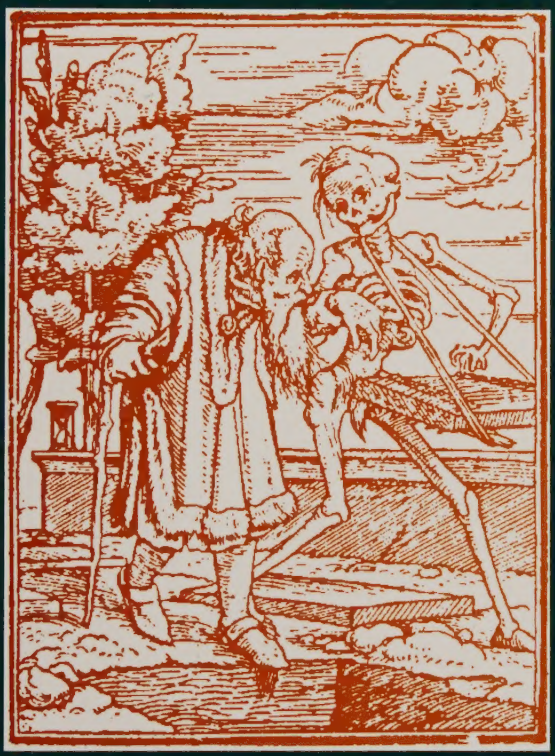
Alex Comfort



Writings against
Power & Death

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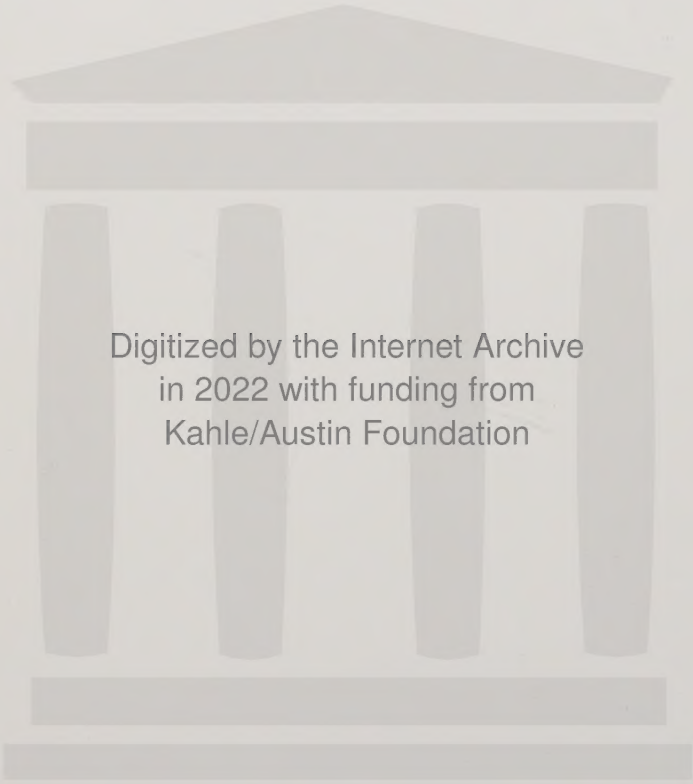

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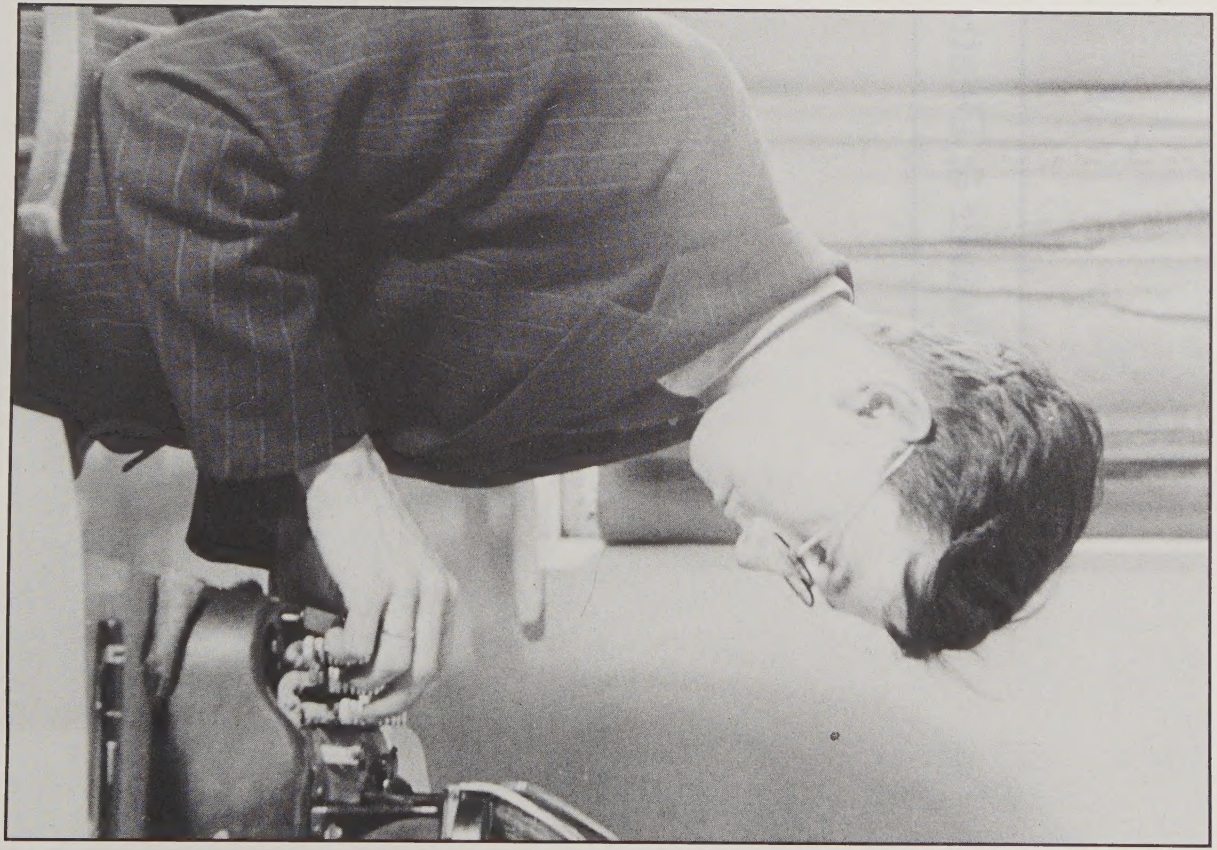

Alex Comfort

photograph by Vernon Richards (1946)

AGAINST POWER AND DEATH

The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets

of

Alex Comfort

Edited with an Introduction

by

David Goodway

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Alex Comfort has gratuitously given me permission to edit and reprint works written by him and published between 1943 and 1986. All the necessary work on this volume has been carried out by me. **David Goodway**.

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Introduction

Early career

Alex Comfort was born in London on 10th February 1920, the son of Alexander Comfort, Assistant Education Officer at the London County Council, and Daisy Comfort (née Fenner).

He won a scholarship in 1932 to Highgate School, where he was a classicist and a prodigiously successful pupil. During the summer of 1936 he went on six weeks' voyage to Argentina and Senegal, his account of which, *The Silver River* (1938), was published commercially, while he was still a schoolboy, by Chapman & Hall, where his publisher was Arthur Waugh, father of the novelist Evelyn Waugh.

In 1938 Comfort went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, as Robert Styring Scholar in Classics, but read medicine. His first novel to be published, *No Such Liberty*, written as a Cambridge undergraduate, appeared in 1941; and *The Almond Tree* (written between June and October 1941) followed in 1942, both under the imprint of Chapman & Hall. Although his poetry had been printed since he was at school, he had to wait for his first proper collection of poems until 1942, when Routledge brought out *A Wreath for the Living*.[1] His publisher now became Herbert Read, with whom he soon developed a friendship and close literary and political association; and Routledge were responsible for the publication of almost all of his books down to the 1960s. Further volumes of poetry were *Elegies* (1944), *The Signal to Engage* (1946) and *And All But He Departed* (1951). From 1942 to 1947 he was co-editor of his own little poetry magazine, *Poetry Folios*.

In 1941 Comfort had gone to qualify as a doctor to the London Hospital, again as a scholar. He proceeded to write *The Power House*, a long and impressive novel which was widely acclaimed on publication in 1944. His potential was regarded as very considerable both as a poet and, perhaps particularly, as a novelist. He published *Letters from an*

Outpost, his only collection of short stories, in 1947; and his next novels were *On This Side Nothing* (1949) and *A Giant's Strength* (1952).

He graduated as MB (Cantab) in 1944 and worked for a year as Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Waterloo Hospital, London, picking up a Diploma in Child Health and thereby his psychological training. In 1945 he returned to the London Hospital as a Demonstrator (later Lecturer) in Physiology. He now built on his boyhood hobby of conchology and in 1949 was awarded a PhD in Biochemistry from London University for his research into the nature of molluscan shell pigments. His twofold background in medicine and biology enabled him to be appointed in 1951 as Honorary Research Associate and then, the following year, as Nuffield Research Fellow in the Biology of Senescence in the Department of Zoology, University College London, working in association with P.B. Medawar.

It is these eight years, 1944 to 1952, seemingly a period of intense professional activity, that saw the production of most of Comfort's social and political writings and from which the contents of this volume are very largely drawn. They are years of a dizzying outpouring of publications over a polymathic range. In addition to the poetry and fiction already mentioned, his books were: *Cecil Collins* (1946), the first, small work on the painter, having its origins in Comfort's stint as art critic for the *New English Weekly*; *Art and Social Responsibility* (1946), Comfort's first collection of articles; *The Novel and Our Time* (1948), an excursion into literary criticism; *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* (1948), published by Freedom Press; *First-Year Physiological Technique* (1948), his London Hospital lectures; *The Pattern of the Future* (1949), the text of a series of four BBC talks; *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950), a staid offshoot from *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* in Duckworth's Social Science Studies series; and *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950), his outstanding contribution to anarchist thought, which I discuss below.[2]

Pacifism

When Comfort went up to Cambridge in 1938 he became an active Congregationalist. This, I assume, was, at least in part, a strong reaction against his family background, which was completely non-religious. Initially he was — as his fellow poet and undergraduate Nicholas Moore remembered him — 'a born-first-time Christian'.[3]

Much more fundamentally, though, Comfort was a pacifist. His pacifism, he has told me, resulted 'from reading World War One reminiscences

when at school'. In this he was, on one of the rare occasions in his life, following a general trend and for, in addition, the conventional reason or reasons: he adhered to the anti-war and pacifist sentiment of the 1930s under the common influence of revulsion at the slaughter of 1914-18.

On the other hand, he held to his pacifism, unlike most of the thirties pacifists, throughout (and beyond) the Second World War. He became moreover 'an aggressive anti-militarist', as he described himself (on the frontispiece to *Art and Social Responsibility*), coming to head while still a medical student the campaign against indiscriminate bombing. Quite what 'aggressive anti-militarism' entails is clearly conveyed by a letter to *Tribune* of 2nd April 1943:

> I wish to associate myself with Mr Harrison's letter. As an Englishman I have a part in the infamy and degradation of our bombing policy, and it is a burden of contempt and hatred which no moderate repudiation can lighten. The bombardment of Europe is not the work of soldiers nor of responsible statesmen. It is the work of bloodthirsty fools. I doubt if the devotion of a citizen Air Force could be more bitterly insulted than by the tasks which our present leadership expects it to perform: no consideration of personal risk run, or personal courage, will be sufficient to solace the conscience of many friends of mine who are pilots.
>
> We deceive neither ourselves, nor the public of Europe, nor the judgment of history. If their own experience at the hands of our enemies had left any doubt in the public's mind of the meaning of organised bombardment, the exhibitions of photographs which tour the country, and the tone of our broadcast commentaries would dispel it. Night after night those Europeans who risk their liberty to listen can hear the emetic boastings and threatenings of bloody-minded and reactionary civilians. They contrast the alacrity and satisfaction which attend each contemptible operation with the subterfuge and sloth which we have displayed in such tasks of constructive policy as the admission to sanctuary of the Jewish refugees.
>
> In contemplating and combating such leaders moderation of thought is neither desirable nor possible. We seem to be in the hands of a government which wishes to cover itself in detail with every infamy it has denounced in the enemy. The contamination of what they have done will extend to all of us, individually, and no repudiation or expostulation will serve to restore us. We condemn the German public and the German writers who made no protest over Lidice. We had better have been silent until our own protest had vindicated us. It seems to me that a particular responsibility belongs to the English writers and artists. They, at least, pretend to value

both life and culture internationally. There are times when denunciation is both a moral and an aesthetic duty. The present seems to me to be one such, and I invite other writers who share my feeling to say so publicly and as soon as possible.

The following week Peter Baker, the future publisher of *Art and Social Responsibility* at the Falcon Press, forcefully denounced Comfort from the Home Forces as 'a humbug'. Comfort replied in typically combative style (a collection of his letters to the press over the years would make lively, probably exhilarating, reading):

I do not want to argue with Lieutenant Baker, as he only criticises my person, and not what I have said. But there are some points which I do not follow. It seems a strange reversal to say that one is only entitled to denounce if one participates in the activities one is denouncing. I refused military service, and I mean to continue to refuse it, because if I had not done so I should have forfeited all moral right to object, no matter what was done. I know that it is all war, and not this particular manifestation of bombing, which I believe to be unjustified, but there are times when a single act of folly and brutality seems so signal that one dare not remain silent. I am not interested in Sinclair or General Quade's remarks about 'legitimate operations of war'. Even if I believe that no operation of war is legitimate, some are less so than others. Lidice was a legitimate security operation (or rather, if it had happened in India, that is what we should have called it) but the odium of it will remain. The same is true of our air bombardment. Lieut Baker is wrong in thinking that one can shuffle off responsibility by being a pacifist. I want to be able to go about in Europe without having to wear a poster saying: 'I am English, but I didn't do it'. Surely Lieut Baker sees that there are some things that not even a soldier who accepts war should stomach?

As to humbug, the less said about that the better. I don't infer that Lieut Baker is a humbug, but I am certain that Sinclair is. The old maxim 'When they do it, howl — when we do it, call it something else and cheer like blazes' is becoming rather doubtful as a sign of intellectual honesty.

I do not want to say more, except that another couple of thousand people (our allies, this time) were killed last week in Rotterdam, Antwerp and some of the Essen factories. But, of course, they enjoy it. It was a bitter humorist who called our bombers Liberators.[4]

Finally, early in 1944, Comfort drafted a declaration protesting against

the allied bombings and organised the signing of the petition by 'writers, artists and musicians', among them Herbert Read, Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, Clifford Curzon, Laurence Housman, Denton Welch, Julian Symons and George Woodcock.[5] In consequence Comfort was officially blacklisted by the BBC.

This aggressive pacifism, emphasising individual responsibility and direct action, is one of the threads running through Comfort's superficially disparate career. His analysis of, and opposition to, the total war of 1939-45 was extended seamlessly to nuclear weapons: 'The atomic bomb is not different in kind or in result from the other weapons and methods of war which characterise contemporary society ...'[6]

For twenty years he was a foremost campaigner against war and the preparations for war: as a speaker and pamphleteer for the Peace Pledge Union (PPU); as a sponsor of the Direct Action Committee (against Nuclear War) (and its precursors); as an activist in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); and as a member of the Committee of 100 (he was one of the 'names', including most famously Bertrand Russell, imprisoned in September 1961 for calling for the Trafalgar Square sit-down). Comfort remains — and maintained his subscriptions during his eleven years' residence from 1973 in the USA — a member of both the PPU and CND.

Comfort's thoroughgoing pacifism (he opposes all war in the modern period) is not combined, very unusually, with a Gandhian advocacy of non-violence. 'I do not believe it is evil to fight,' he explained in 1946: 'We have to fight obedience in this generation as the French maquisards fought for it, with the reservation that terrorism, while it is understandable, is not an effective instrument of combating tyranny'.[7]

The French Maquis provided Comfort during the Second World War with a major inspiration, affording him a model of popular resistance, by individuals not in association with any State. This is exemplified especially — indeed anticipated — in his novel *The Power House*.

His pacifist rhetoric can be extraordinarily violent in language, although it is usually unclear exactly what acts he is advocating.

> We have just witnessed an act of criminal lunacy which must be without parallel in recorded history. A city of 300,000 people has been suddenly and deliberately obliterated by the English and American governments ... It is difficult to express in coherent language the contempt and shame which we feel ... The only remedy which is possible to us, if we are to remain human beings, and not to be lepers in the eyes of every decent

> person and every period of history, is the condign punishment of the men responsible. Not one political leader who has tolerated this filthy thing, or the indiscriminate bombardment of Germany which preceded it, should be permitted to escape the consequence of what he has done ... It is high time we tried our own war criminals.

It was in this way that he greeted the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; but the American editors of the *Conscientious Objector* who, as well as *War Commentary*, printed his statement disassociated themselves at some length from his 'implied conclusion': 'In the first place, we don't know what punishment fits the crime in this case. And, in the second place, if we did we would not inflict it'.[8]

Comfort did know and wrote in a contemporary poem:

> *There is one freedom only —*
> *to take the hands of men called enemies*
> *and you and they walking together go*
> *to seek out every throat that told you Kill*[9]

Anarchism

For Comfort 'the tenets which ... make up the political expression of pacifism' are threefold:

> ... that every appeal to organised force, by its degeneration into irresponsibility, is a counter-revolutionary process, and tends to produce tyranny[;] that the only effective answer to total regimentation is total disobedience; and that there is nothing which is more disastrous than contemporary war — nothing which can make war a 'lesser evil'.

He therefore came to believe that 'pacifism rests solely upon the historical theory of anarchism'.[10]

I have asked Alex Comfort 'When (and why) did you become an anarchist?' He replied: 'Oddly enough I don't recall, but it clearly occurred or crystallised over time after about 1940. One might be able to check when I first used the title as identification.' I have not been able to establish when he first began to call himself an anarchist, but he was certainly one by 1942-3;[11] and *The Power House* (published in 1944, but written in 1942-3) is a powerful anarchist novel.[12]

It seems clear, as I have indicated, that Comfort came to anarchism

through pacifism. It was certainly not through socialism nor through anarchist writers. His ideas developed independently of intellectual influence, until he came to realise that they correspond to an existing 'historical theory': anarchism.

> I write as an anarchist, that is, as one who rejects the conception of power in society as a force which is both anti-social and unsound in terms of general biological principle. If I have any metaphysical and ethical rule on which to base my ideas, it is that of human solidarity and mutual aid against a hostile environment ...[13]

Comfort's political theory is simple but highly individual and original. The existing situation is one of *social barbarism* or *irresponsible society*, dependent on *obedience*. *Civilisation* can only be defended — or expanded — by *individual resistance*, by the individual exercising *responsibility* through *disobedience*.

> Resistance and disobedience are still the only forces able to cope with barbarism, and so long as we do not practice them we are unarmed ... We have one enemy, irresponsible government, against which we are committed to a perpetual and unrelenting maquis. Every government that intends war is as much our enemy as ever the Germans were ... wars are not deplorable accidents produced by the perfidy of degenerate nations — they are the results of calculated policy: we will set them outside the bounds of calculation. Atrocities are not only the work of sadists — your friends and relatives who butchered the whole of Hamburg were not sadists — they are the result of obedience, an obedience which forgets its humanity. We will not accept that obedience. The safeguard of peace is not a vast army, but an unreliable public, a public that will fill the streets and empty the factories at the word War, that will learn and accept the lesson of resistance. The only way to stop atrocities is to refuse to participate in them.

This is from *Peace and Disobedience*, a seven-page Peace News Pamphlet of 1946, from which I have quoted twice before. It is Comfort's finest single statement of his anarchist politics, eloquent and relatively comprehensive. But there is also another Peace News Pamphlet, *The Right Thing To Do* (1949) — until their appearance in the present volume neither pamphlet had ever been republished — while *Art and Social Responsibility* (1946), his first collection of essays, contains his most extended political

declarations (in 'Art and Social Responsibility' and 'The End of a War', both of which first appeared in George Woodcock's *NOW*).[14]

Comfort has always been a prolific writer and he was spectacularly so during the ten years from the early 1940s to early 1950s. His anarchism is expressed and developed not just in his explicitly political and polemical essays and pamphlets, but also in his novels — especially *The Power House* and *On This Side Nothing* — the short stories of *Letters from an Outpost*, his volumes of poetry, and his critical works (notably *The Novel and Our Time*), as well as his important socio-political treatises, *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* and *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*.

Comfort is a poet; and Harold Drasdo may well be right in commenting that in the 1940s:

> He seems to be one of those writers like Thoreau whose best poetry is found in their prose — who can't stop playing with words. We see this in *The Power House* [page 318] and *Art and Social Responsibility* [page 31] when, for example, 'Europe stinks of murder and groans with partings' is varied as 'Europe stinks of blood and groans with separation'.[15]

But Comfort also continually recycles his work (especially reviews and other articles) — as a professional scientist writing in his spare time he could not afford not to.

Still, fundamentally, for Comfort 'it is all one project'. That is how he reacts to comments on the diverse spread of his activities; and he was saying the same thing forty years ago:

> If the mixture of books and pamphlets which I have produced ... seems confused, I can only say that it represents a unified effort as far as I am concerned. While the suspicion of propagandist art is sound, it obscures the fact that all writing has content. The content of mine is what I think and believe about human responsibility, and accordingly everything I write is didactic, since I have tried to express my preoccupations both in action and in print.[16]

However this may be, in the 1940s Comfort was constantly rephrasing and developing his ideas and certainly expounding his anarchism in all the literary forms he was using. Two examples of this can be drawn from a poem and a political essay. In the section entitled 'Notes for My Son' of 'The Song of Lazarus' he writes 'Remember when you hear them

beginning to say Freedom / Look carefully — see who it is they want you to butcher', and in 'The End of a War': '... when they begin to say "Look, injustice", you must reply "Whom do you want me to kill?"'. In 'Notes for My Son' he memorably enjoins '... when they come to sell you their bloody corruption / you will gather the spit of your chest / and plant it in their faces', but in 'The End of a War' he declares even more effectively 'I hope so to instruct my sons that they will give the recruiting agent the one reply he merits, a good eyeful of spit.'[17]

Comfort's is a harsh and powerful anarchism, urgent and compelling. My first, mesmerising acquaintance with these remarkable pamphlets and articles was through the lengthy extracts quoted in *Anarchy* in 1962 by Nicolas Walter, who rightly concluded that Comfort was 'the true voice of nuclear disarmament, much more than that of Bertrand Russell or anyone else ...' 'At the end of the last war', he continued, Comfort 'wrote its obituary and drew its moral. What he said is as valid and valuable as it was then, when he was a very young man who kept his head when all about were losing theirs, and I can think of nothing better to say to very young people who are trying to do the same thing eighteen years later ...'[18] Comfort's voice was never a widely influential one; but I suspect that many of those who responded favourably to it during the twenty years of his aggressive anti-militarist campaigning find, like me, its rhythms, analysis and imperatives unforgettable.

For all this, Comfort's political theory, his pacifist anarchism, is severely limited. Three major criticisms can be levelled at it.

First, the theory is centred entirely on the notion of obedience. As E.P. Thompson commented in a review of *The Signal to Engage* (1946):

> He comes forward as a prophet with a simple message — that war (this war the same as all others) is caused by Obedience and we have only to kill those who ask us to Obey to end war ... war (not this war, *any* war) becomes a shadowy abstraction, many times removed from the real battles of living men making real history, the real problems and the real anguish which make up a part of the lives of all of us.[19]

Second, and closely connected with this justified complaint of the absence of 'the real battles of living men making real history', Comfort's anarchism lacks an historical theory or any significant sense of history.

Third, I have described Comfort's view of anarchism as 'original'. But its originality is largely to be explained by its initial formulation independent of intellectual influence. Its limitations can be equally

understood by the realisation that it did not develop within a living, dialectical tradition of thought and action. Similarly, Comfort's ideas and conceptual terms were not taken up, adapted and employed by other libertarian writers. After his striking exposition of them in the 1940s, he himself ceased to elaborate — certainly to develop — them. *Social Responsibility in Science and Art* (reprinted below, pages 139-146), a Third Programme talk published as another Peace News Pamphlet, and very much a repetition of earlier writings, marks his effective withdrawal from political theory by 1952.

Science and anarchism

What I have been discussing so far has been Comfort's anarchist political theory — as opposed to his total conception of anarchism.

In a preface to the selected poems of Kenneth Patchen, Comfort declared: 'The existence of medical science and of this kind of poetry are the only two factors which give contemporary Western life any claim to be called a civilisation'.[20] This statement points to the second principal facet of Comfort's anarchism: its grounding in science.

Comfort qualified as, and has worked as, a doctor; he has a PhD in biochemistry; and he was the pioneer of gerontology in this country (this was his central activity as a Research Fellow at University College London, where he remained from his appointment in 1951 until he emigrated to the United States in 1973). For him it is science which comes first, not anarchism.

> I recognise two obligations — to do nothing to increase the total of human suffering, and to leave nothing undone which diminishes it. For that reason I personally think I should split my time between letters and applied science, and so ... I feel that art is concerned to state the problem, and science and direct action (not 'politics' but mutual aid) to solve it in so far as it can be solved.
>
> I think this view is at root scientific, and if I find contrary evidence I'll certainly alter it — publicly — but at present it explains more observed facts than any other theory of reality which I know.[21]

So 'his scientific conclusions drove him to anarchism, and ... if scientific investigation led him elsewhere he would abandon anarchism'. This is Colin Ward's summary of Comfort's position and he commented:

> I think he was wrong. I do not think the case for anarchism rests on 'science'. I think it is ultimately based on the aspirations of the heart rather than the deductions of the mind.[22]

John Doheny, a Canadian literary academic and a lifelong admirer of Comfort's *oeuvre*, retorted:

> If I understand Comfort, he is not 'wrong', for 'deductions of the mind' (or 'science') are merely the ideal, the momentary end result of the processes, that were begun by 'the aspirations of the heart' ... I would suggest that the 'deductions of the mind' are the aspirations crystallised.[23]

Doheny's response seems to me entirely misguided. Comfort's stance may appear extreme to contemporary anarchists — and Ward's reformulation disarmingly attractive. Historically, though, anarchists have, with few or no reservations, regarded science as a force for progress: being the revelation of the structure of the natural world (including human beings) and hence in opposition to the mystifying claims of religious superstition, of class rule and, after 1917, of ideology. It has only been in the late twentieth century that science and radical politics have become uncoupled — with the rejection of many of the applications of science in contradistinction to scientific knowledge *per se*.[24]

Anarchism and sociology

What kind of science can 'solve the problem'? The relevant sciences, for Comfort, are biological, medical and social — the life sciences, we might say. During a key period in his thinking — which produced *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950) — it was social psychology and sociology which he judged most relevant.

> At the present time we are just beginning to approach the problems of society, of which war is perhaps the chief, by way of scientific study instead of along the traditional lines of what we can call Western political thought. We want to deal with these problems, if possible, by the same general methods as we have used, with such outstanding success in dealing with phenomena like smallpox. And I feel pretty certain that the most important addition to our understanding of man and society since the beginning of the century has been the demonstration that human behaviour is comprehensible — not something springing from a mystical background of

> original sin and original virtue but an intelligible response of an entity, human character, to its environment.[25]

This is from an article of 1950. Comfort republished it in the New York anarchist journal *Resistance* in 1954, now adding in conclusion:

> The task of the 'revolutionary', the individual committed to the purposive changing of the pattern of society toward the life-centred values, can now no longer be treated as a task of political intrigue. It is a branch of medicine — its main weapons are study and conciliation upon one hand, and readiness to disobey, based upon combined love and self-interest upon the other.[26]

So he could begin the final, much-quoted chapter of *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* with a bold flourish:

> This is an age of discouraged revolutionaries. The nineteenth-century pattern of violent social change from below commands the full allegiance of serious sociologists only in those countries which lagged behind in the pattern of centralisation — the Balkan States, Spain and Italy, the Communist States, and the emergent nationalist movements of the East.
> ... modern sociolgy would seem to uphold the libertarian-anarchist rather than the totalitarian-institutional conception of social change,

he continued:

> ... the basic tenets of many of the earlier anarchist writers, fundamental human sociality, the inappropriateness of coercive means to modify cultural patterns, and the basing of political change upon the assumption of personal responsibility by individuals, through 'mutual aid' and 'direct action', retain general validity in terms of the new conception of sociology ...

He therefore concluded (and again I cite Comfort at length, since he is his best expositor):

> If the word 'anarchism', as a name for the attempt to effect changes away from the centralised and institutional towards the social and 'life-oriented' society, carries irrational implications, or suggests a preconceived ideology either of man or of society, we may hesitate to accept it. No branch of science can afford to ally itself with revolutionary fantasy, with emotionally

> determined ideas of human conduct, or with psychopathic attitudes. On the other hand suggested alternatives — 'biotechnic civilisation' (Mumford), 'para-primitive society' (G.R. Taylor) — have little advantage beyond their novelty, and acknowledge none of the debts which we owe to the pioneers ...
>
> If, therefore, the intervention of sociology in modern affairs tends to propagate a form of anarchism, it is an anarchism based on observational research, which has little in common with the older revolutionary theory beside its objectives. It rests upon standards of scientific assessment to which the propagandist and actionist elements in nineteenth-century revolutionary thought are highly inimical. It is also experimental and tentative rather than dogmatic and Messianic. As a theory of revolution it recognises the revolutionary process as one to which no further limit can be imposed — revolution of this kind is not a single act of redress or vengeance followed by a golden age; but a continuous human activity whose objectives recede as it progresses.[27]

In *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*, his classic contribution to libertarian theory, Comfort applied the findings of psychiatry and social psychology to contemporary politics. Its subtitle was 'A Criminological Approach to the Problem of Power'. (It was reissued simply as *Authority and Delinquency* in 1970 as a Sphere paperback, now subtitled 'A Study in the Psychology of Power', and again in 1988 as the first in the Libertarian Critique series published by Zwan, later Pluto.) Comfort maintains that the modern state attracts psychopaths selectively to positions of authority and, furthermore, fosters and increases delinquent behaviour in its powerholders. It is therefore, in effect, a treatise on Acton's dictum that 'All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely' for the conditions of the mid-twentieth century. I first read *Authority and Delinquency* at the age of 21 and it made an indelible impact on me. I have never since, for thirty years, been able to take seriously the pretensions of any occupants of positions of power, especially politicians.

The New Anarchism

In a lecture to the Anarchist Summer School of 1950 Comfort made yet another of his striking statements:

> Personally, I would like to see more of us, those who can, taking training in social sciences or engaging in research in this field. I do not want to try

> to turn anarchism into a sociological Fabian Society, from which non-scientists are excluded. I want to see something done which has not been done before — a concerted, unbiased, and properly documented attempt to disseminate accurate teaching of the results of modern child psychology, social psychology and political psychology to the general public on the same scale as we have in the past tried to disseminate revolutionary propaganda.[28]

Colin Ward (as 'John Ellerby') quoted the passage in 1963 in *Anarchy* and remarked that 'some anarchists took this advice seriously — a by-product of the result can be seen in some of the authoritative material which has been published in this journal'.[29]

How influential *was* Alex Comfort in directing the attention of sociologists to the fit between their discipline and anarchism? One of *Anarchy*'s contributors, Stan Cohen, reiterated in 1985 that anarchism is 'the political philosophy most consistent with sociology'. That is, both anarchism and sociology highlight the centrality of such concepts as mutual aid, fraternity, good-neighbourliness.[30] All the same, the only example, of which I know, of a prominent sociologist responding directly to Comfort's conception of a libertarian action sociology is T.B. (Tom) Bottomore. In 1951 Bottomore, then a research assistant at the London School of Economics, wrote to Comfort after reading *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*, asking for information about the experimental social groups advocated there, as he wished to participate in one himself. Yet Bottomore went on to become a Marxist, not an anarchist, sociologist.[31]

On the other hand there can be no doubt that Comfort anticipated the applied, pragmatic anarchism of Colin Ward and *Anarchy*. This is made entirely explicit by Comfort's proposals in 1951 for some kind of an Anarchist Encyclopaedia as well as an anarchist exhibition connected with the Festival of Britain. Unfortunately, no copy of his 'syllabus', the outline of a book to be published not by Routledge but, presumably, by FREEDOM PRESS, appears to have survived. What does is Herbert Read's reply, beginning:

> What an optimist you are! I don't mean philosophically, but practically — to think (1) that the people exist to carry through your scheme; and (2) that FREEDOM would stand for it. But still I am entirely with you. Such a reassessment is what we need, and if we cannot produce it, our essential weakness is revealed.

Comfort's response to Read gives the fullest idea of what he had in mind:

> I agree I'm an optimist. But unless libertarians are a little clearer in their own heads they lay themselves wide open, especially when the C[ommunist] P[arty] and others *can* produce a perfectly explicit account of what they propose and how they mean to get it. I mean to see what can be done via *Freedom* (Vero [Richards] and John [Hewetson] were both keen) and if the result there isn't fully adequate I mean to try to assemble a kind of Encyclopaedia of my own. Could we ourselves try to convoke a group of men we know to be sympathetic to the broader principle (not necessarily 'anarchism' with a slogan on a pole) who could write a manifesto of this kind in detail? I think at the present time it could have real historical importance. Failing that, I shall have to do the requisite reading and concoct the whole thing myself, but it would need a book of the general stature of *Das Kapital*, and I need to be exiled to find time to write it. I'm satisfied it has to be done, with psychology replacing Engels and economics.
>
> I'm also talking the others into staging a small anarchist exhibition for the Festival [of Britain]! I thought it would draw a crowd — to see some of the historical material F[reedom] P[ress] possess, much of it interesting, and a pictorial montage of what anarchist thought has actually achieved, by way of impact on thought in other fields, from Godwin to the present: I wanted to include its influence on socialism, town planning, psychology, education and communal living experiments. John liked the idea and didn't regard it as beyond our resources. I do think the others are coming to accept our role as being that of an ideas factory, for the present and in this country, rather than a mass movement.

Herbert Read, his fellow anarchist polymath, considered that Comfort's 'syllabus' alone omitted agriculture, but that the project's 'possibility depends on being able to bring in outsiders like Mumford and Scott Williamson'.[32]

Attention should be drawn to several noteworthy features of Comfort's letter. There is his hubris: he has the ability to produce a work of the stature of *Das Kapital*, it is only the time that he lacks. There is his conviction that the role of anarchism in Britain had become that of an 'ideas factory', not a mass movement, something that the FREEDOM PRESS group in effect acknowledged when it published *Anarchy* between 1961 and 1970 and thereby allowed Colin Ward his head.

There is also his assurance that 'Engels and economics' needed to be replaced by psychology. This line of thinking was expanded upon in a

remarkable short *New Statesman* article of three years before.

> The changes in our patterns of living have gone so far since Marx and Engels that some of their comment on historical forces look as archaïc as a full-bottomed wig. To the economic factors of the Industrial Revolution, which began the present process, we have to add innumerable new factors, previously overlooked. To Marxism we have to add social anthropology, and we revise in adding ... A proletariat, a body of dispossessed people attempting to secure its rights, is a social unit. You can rally it, organise it as a mob or a class, and base your estimate of its probable conduct on knowledge of the common attitude of its members to one another and to other classes. Dispossession in contemporary urban society, both here and in America, is of an entirely different kind. It is biological rather than economic, it affects the management as well as the citizens, and where it is canalised into overt acts, those acts tend to take the form not of revolutionary action but of individual delinquency or communal aggression. The economic proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains; the dispossessed today, as they figure in social anthropology or attend out-patient clinics, have lost everything but their identity.[33]

So Comfort comprehensively rejects not only Marxism but also the quasi-Marxist 'class-struggle' anarchism of anarchism's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century heyday. He himself had never embraced either in his own idiosyncratic route to anarchism — *for he has never, at any point, been a socialist.* As he wrote during World War Two: 'The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society'.[34]

In total, Comfort is a pioneer, along with Paul Goodman in the 1940s and 1950s, of the 'new anarchism' which has emerged so impressively, particularly in Britain and the USA. Lewis Mumford and Aldous Huxley can, not unrealistically, be regarded as its forerunners in the 1930s. Colin Ward and, perhaps above all, Murray Bookchin in their very different ways exemplify this new anarchism of the late-twentieth century — with its emphasis on biology, ecology, anthropology, alternative technology: as opposed to 'Engels and economics'.

Comfort, though, is different from Ward and Bookchin in one important respect. Both Ward and Bookchin are optimists and have a rosy view of human beings and their potentialities. Comfort contrasts by having a pessimistic edge, black and paranoiac: the thrust of his anarchism is not in the release of humankind's innate goodness, but in checking and dispersing its endless capacity for destructiveness and cruelty.[35]

Literature

Although this is a collection of political and social writings, something should be said about Comfort's literary affinities, given the way 'it is all one project for him'.

I have already quoted his typically striking declaration, in connection with Kenneth Patchen's poems, that 'The existence of medical science and of this kind of poetry are the only two factors which give contemporary Western life any claim to be called a civilisation'. In the post-war years it was Patchen and other American writers such as Henry Miller, E.E. Cummings and Kenneth Rexroth whom Comfort admired. They wrote 'as if they were citizens of an occupied country'; for them '"victory" in the conventional sense amounted to a personal defeat'. It is to their blend of pessimistic humanism and libertarian individualism that Comfort's own novels and poetry are most akin — rather than to any of his British contemporaries.[36]

Similarly, Comfort responded warmly to Kafka, Jean Giono, Ignazio Silone and, above all, Albert Camus. In his view Camus was probably 'the most important living novelist' and he was so impressed by *The Plague* (1947; English translation, 1948) that he was inspired to write *On This Side Nothing* (1949), which has a derivative North African setting, but which I consider Comfort's best novel. For Comfort the key passage in *The Plague* is that in which the mysterious Tarrou explains his background, experiences and thinking to Rieux, the doctor. Tarrou says: 'All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it's up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences' — a statement which Comfort kept repeating in his own political writings.[37] Comfort concluded: 'Very few readers who share anything of the insight of Tarrou will read this novel without being as profoundly influenced by it as Shelley was by *Political Justice*. Unesco should have it printed and sent free to every human being in Europe'.[38] (Comfort has been particularly struck by the relationship between Godwin and Shelley, saying, for example, 'If [Godwin] did not make anarchism popular, at least he inspired Shelley'.)[39]

Later career

I have stressed that Comfort had effectively withdrawn from political theory by 1952. Almost exactly the same applies to the cascade of ideas relating anarchism to the life sciences, particularly sociology. That also

came to just as complete — and even more unexpected an end— in the course of 1951. What is the explanation for this?

It seems probable that Comfort was discouraged by a negative reaction to his enthusiastic programme for an Anarchist Encyclopaedia in January 1951. Certainly nothing more was heard of this project. He had been a fairly frequent contributor to *Freedom* since 1947 and especially between May 1950 and May 1951, when he published in it ten times (articles and letters). From May 1951 this terminated — with the solitary exception of the printing of the text of his radio talk 'Social Responsibility in Science and Art' in December 1951.

Overriding these considerations, the cessation of his anarchist writings and theorising must also relate to his appointment to the Department of Zoology, University College London, in 1951-2. The 1950s saw Comfort's main effort concentrated in the biology of ageing. He published the standard textbook on the subject, *The Biology of Senescence*, in 1956; he received the Ciba Foundation Prize for research into the nature of age processes in 1958; and in 1963 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by the University of London for his work on gerontology. After *And All But He Departed* (1951) there was not another volume of poetry until *Haste to the Wedding* (1962). After *A Giant's Strength* (1952) no novel appeared until *Come Out to Play* (1961). *Art and Social Responsibility* had been a first, precocious collection of articles in 1946; his second, *Darwin and the Naked Lady*, was not published till 1962.

The 1960s were a transitional decade for Comfort. *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom*, his FREEDOM PRESS book of 1948, had been the starting point for *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950), which was revised as *Sex in Society* (1963). Then, in 1962, came a formative experience when he was invited to visit India at the suggestion of his former colleague, the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane. A translation from the Sanskrit of the medieval erotological classic, *The Koka Shastra*, immediately resulted in 1964. Comfort's own manuals, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking* and *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex*, which he wrote as a medical biologist, followed in 1972 and 1973 respectively. They have achieved phenomenal sales worldwide — twelve million as of 1993 — and he is now best known as their author.

In 1973 Comfort emigrated to the United States to work at a radical think-tank, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara. The Center folded the following year, but he remained in California holding a series of posts as: Lecturer in Psychiatry, Stanford University; Professor of Pathology, University of California School of

Medicine, Irvine; Consultant Psychiatrist, Brentwood Veterans' Hospital, Los Angeles; Adjunct Professor, Neuropsychiatric Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. In 1985 he retired and returned to live in England.

In the 1960s Comfort had written several works of scientific popularisation — *The Process of Ageing* (1964), *Nature and Human Nature* (1965), *The Anxiety Makers* (1967) — but later books, such as *I and That: Notes on the Biology of Religion* (1979) and *Reality and Empathy: Physics, Mind and Science in the 21st Century* (1984) have been a good deal more abstruse. Since the sixties he has published three more novels — *Tetrarch* (1980), *Imperial Patient* (1987) and *The Philosophers* (1989) — but only one volume of poetry, *Poems for Jane* (1979).

Anarchism ceased to be of the central importance it had been to him for the ten years or so from the early 1940s to the early 1950s. Some feminists give *The Joy of Sex* a rough handling, complaining that 'it is the male voice and masculine values that predominate in the end'.[40] Most anarchists, male and female, will, though, probably be inclined to agree with Peter Marshall's appraisal of *The Joy of Sex* as representing Comfort's 'hedonistic and libertarian message in its most popular form ... While it is one of the least inhibited books about sex ever written, its dominant note is one of tenderness and joy'.[41] *More Joy* even contains a short anarchist disquisition on the relationship between sexuality and politics under the heading of 'selfishness':

> ... acquiring the awareness and the attitudes which can come from [good sexual] experience doesn't make for selfish withdrawal: it's more inclined to radicalise people.
>
> The antisexualism of authoritarian societies and the people who run them doesn't spring from conviction (they themselves have sex), but from the vague perception that freedom here might lead to a liking for freedom elsewhere. People who have eroticised their experience of themselves and the world are, on the one hand, inconveniently unwarlike ... and on the other, violently combative in resisting goons, political salesmen [and] racists and 'garbage' people generally who threaten the personal freedom they've attained and want to see others share.
>
> The obsession with money-grubbing and power-hunting is quite largely fuelled by early distortions of body image and self-esteem — distortions that carry over into a whole range of political behaviour, from hating and bullying people to wrecking the countryside for a profit you don't need and can't use. In fact, most great powers are now run by a minority of sick

> people, suffering from their inability to eroticise and hence humanise their experience, who use the rest of us for play therapy.[42]

So Comfort's politics continue unchanged. On applying for an American visa in 1972, he declared himself an anarchist:

> ... I had an interesting conversation with a highly intelligent black official about the influence of Godwin on Thomas Jefferson, and I explained to him that anarchists in the modern world are about the only people who do not believe in terrorism and throwing large spherical objects — simply in taking responsibility for our own actions.[43]

When I asked him in 1988 whether he was still an anarchist, he thought for a moment, then reached for his most recent collection of articles, *What is a Doctor?*, and directed me to the following lengthy passage, addressed to an American medical readership.

> ... I am an anarchist, and that gives rise to problems at once: 'anarchist' in some minds means a violent and disruptive radical ... In fact it simply means someone who thinks that centralised power should be reduced to the practical minimum and individual responsibility increased to the practical maximum — not at all a frightening idea to Americans used to talking about free enterprise. One could have refused combat by using some other name, but the ideology is important to doctors as a professional matter, because it is already implicit in our acceptance of the independence of the physician, his responsibility to the patient, and the patient's inalienable rights. A decent docter practising excellent medicine is an ideological 'anarchist' whether he likes it or not, and regardless of how, or whether, he votes. The doctor is anarchistic not democratic, mind you — for if the majority vote to withhold treatment from Jews or to kill persons over 70, he will tell the majority to go to the devil, as he should. If the majority's alguazils forbid him the use of certain medications which he considers necessary and beneficial, he will ignore of outwit them, as he should. Recognition of exactly what our ideolgy is, in relation to society, bureaucracy, medical independence, our responsibility to the community, and the crosscurrents of combat over 'public' and 'private' medicine is a help, not a hindrance. It is a practical matter, too — what is our final relation to authority? Do we serve the patient in a one-to-one human relationship? Or do we serve the hospital, the army, the prison service, the PSRO, the FDA, the Blues or the Golden Calf? If the answer is 'yes' to the first question

> and 'no' to the second group of alternatives, then you are an anarchist, like Hippocrates, and you might as well get comfortable with the label. It has nothing to so with 'right' and 'left' or with communism and capitalism or with Tweedle-Rep. and Tweedle-Dem. It is something you do in the privacy of your office, not the hustings or the voting booth. Actually the lack of a label which cannot be misconstrued is one of the limitations on the vigorous forces of American populism which believes in doing things yourself (direct action) with the cooperation of, and for the good of, others (mutual aid). Nor can you *vote* for an anarchist, because that would be a contradiction in terms ...[44]

Here, therefore, we have Comfort continuing, as in the 1940s, to stress the centrality of responsibility and to adhere to a politics combining direct action with mutual aid. Very little, if anything, has altered.

Neither has his combativity and subversiveness changed — nor his ability to write a rousing letter, as with this on the poll tax:

> It is quite clear that in contrast to the Government's expectations in introducing the poll tax, many people who will profit from it in comparison with the rates view the tax and its authors with contempt. They would like to place themselves on the side of the victimised by helping to make the tax uncollectable, but refusal to pay will be traduced as greed.
>
> I am considering paying the bulk of the tax, but withholding ten or twenty pounds and telling the local authority that they will have to come and get it. That will forestall attempts to blame the collapse of services on the non-payment campaign, while adding to the inevitable chaos.[45]

David Goodway

Notes

1. A strange broadsheet-cum-pamphlet collection, *France and Other Poems*, had been printed by the Favil Press in 1941.
2. I am indebted for some of the foregoing — and following — detail to the very useful 'Chronology' in the only book, in the Twayne's English Authors Series, to have so far been written on Comfort: Arthur E. Salmon, *Alex Comfort* (Boston, 1978), pages 13-15. The most comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography (derived from Comfort's *Who's Who* entry) is provided in the entry by Derek Stanford in D.L. Kirkpatrick (editor), *Contemporary Novelists* (London, 4th edition, 1986), pages 198-199. (I owe this last reference — and much else — to my fellow Comfort enthusiast, Richard Schofield.)

3. Nicholas Moore, 'At the Start of the Forties' in *Aquarius*, numbers 17/18 (1986-87).
4. *Tribune*, 16th April 1943.
5. University College London: Alex Comfort Papers, Box 6, File 2, for details.
6. *Peace News*, 7th December 1945. This article, 'An Anarchist View: The Political Relevance of Pacifism', is reprinted in full below, pages 49-51.
7. *Peace and Disobedience* (London [1946]), pages 2-3. The entire pamphlet is reprinted below, pages 48-49.
8. *Conscientious Objector*, September 1945. Comfort's statement is reprinted below, pages 48-49.
9. 'The Wingless Victory' in *The Signal to Engage* (London, 1946), page 11. Cf. Derek Stanford, *Inside the Forties: Literary Memoirs 1937-1957* (London, 1977), pages 97-99.
10. *Peace and Disobedience*, pages 2-3. The full text is reprinted below, pages 79-85.
11. University of Victoria, Victoria, BC: Read Archive, letters from Read to Comfort, 8th August 1943, and from Comfort to Read, 3rd November 1943; University of Reading, Routledge Archive, Box 1844, letter from Comfort to Read, 10th August [1943]; Alex Comfort, 'An Exposition of Irresponsibility' in *Life and Letters Today*, XXXIX (October 1943), reprinted below, pages 31-36.
12. Comfort dated the writing of *The Power House* (London, 1944), page 322, as "February 10, 1942, to July 14, 1943". But cf. *Readers News*, volume 8, number 6 (January 1946) where he states: "I began it in 1941, at the London Hospital Annexe at Brentwood".
13. *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* (London, 1948), page 3.
14. 'The Right Thing to Do', a BBC talk, was first printed in the *Listener* and then, under the title 'The Standards of Humanity', in *Freedom*, 24th December 1948. (The pamphlet *The Right Thing to Do* also contained 'The Wrong Thing to Do', a speech delivered at a PPU meeting.) 'Art and Social Responsibility' in *NOW*, volume 2 (no date), is reprinted below, pages 52-78, in its 1946 version. 'The End of War' is reprinted, pages 36-41, in its first manifestation, 'October 1944', from *NOW*, volume 4 (no date).
15. Harold Drasdo, 'Alex Comfort's Art and Scope' in *Anarchy*, number 33 (November 1963), page 355.
16. Stanley J. Kunitz (editor), *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement* (New York, 1955), page 221.
17. *The Signal to Engage*, pages 31-32; *Art and Social Responsibility*, page 83.
18. Nicolas Walter, 'Disobedience and the New Pacifism' in *Anarchy*, number 14 (April 1962), page 112. This and the preceding article, 'Direct Action and the New Pacifism', in *Anarchy* number 13 (March 1962), were revised as *Nonviolent Resistance: Men Against War* (London, 1963).
19. Unfortunately I have no location or date for this review of five volumes of poetry under the heading 'Poetry's not so Easy'. It is an item in one of Alex Comfort's personal books of press clippings, now deposited with the Comfort Papers.
20. Kenneth Patchen, *Outlaw of the Lowest Planet* (London, 1946), page v Comfort's preface is reprinted below, pages 86-87.
21. *Resistance* (London), October 1946. For the full statement see below, page 97.
22. Colin Ward, 'From the Outside Looking In' in *University Libertarian*, number 1 (December 1955).
23. *University Libertarian*, number 2 (winter 1957).
24. In addition to the works of Kropotkin, see, for example, April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London 1971), pages 99-100, and Frank Harrison, 'Science and

Anarchism; From Bakunin to Bookchin' in *Our Generation*, volume 20, number 2 (spring 1989).

25. 'The Individual and World Peace' in *One World*, August/September 1950.
26. 'The Individual and World Peace' in *Resistance* (New York), June 1954. The article is reprinted in full below, pages 146-154.
27. *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (London, 1950), pages 86, 93-94 and 96.
28. *Delinquency* (London, 1951), page 13, in *The Raven* number 16 (October/December 1991).
29. John Ellerby, 'The Anarchism of Alex Comfort' in *Anarchy*, number 33 (November 1963), page 337.
30. Stan Cohen, *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification* (Oxford, 1985), pages 267 and 272.
31. Comfort Papers, Box 2, File 4, letters from Thomas Bottomore, 4, 29th March 1951. The relevant passage of *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* is on page 105.
32. Read Archive, letter from Read to Comfort, 25th January 1951; letter from Comfort to Read, 27th January 1951. (There is a photocopy of Read's letter in the Comfort Papers, Box 5, File 1.)
33. 'On Defending a Telephone Exchange' in *New Statesman and Nation*, 6th November 1948. This article is reprinted below, pages106-109.
34. *Art and Social Responsibility*, page 29.
35. I am indebted to Nicolas Walter for pressing me to this formulation, although I realise that it is this characteristic of Comfort's anarchism that I have always found especially appealing.
36. 'War, Peace and Literature', unattributed article in Alex Comfort's clippings books, reprinted below, pages 87-90.
37. In his own translation. See *The Right Thing to Do* (1949) — see pages 109-113 below — and *Social Responsibility in Science and Art* (1952) — see pages 139-146 below. I have quoted from the standard translation by Stuart Gilbert of *The Plague* (Penguin edition, 1960), page 207 — see pages 201-209 for Tarrou's exposition.
38. The two quotations are from the *Readers News* article reprinted below, pages 117-119; but Comfort had previously reviewed *The Plague* for both *Tribune* and (?) the *Listener*. See also Salmon, pages 90-92, for the influence of Camus on Comfort.
39. *Darwin and the Naked Lady: Discursive Essays on Biology and Art* (London, 1961), pages 21 and 98. 'The Rape of Andromeda', the essay from which the quotation is taken, was printed in abridged form as 'Sex-and-Violence and the Origins of the Novel' in *Anarchy*, number 1 (March 1961), oddly Comfort's sole contribution to *Anarchy*.
40. Rosalind Brunt, 'Permissive Advice in the 1970s' in Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (editors), *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (London, 1982), pages 160 and 166-167. I am grateful to Judy Greenway for drawing my attention to these substantial reservations in general and Brunt's critique in particular.
41. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London, 1992), pages 596-597.
42. *More Joy* (London, 1984 edition), pages 133-134.
43. 'Letter after America' in *Freedom: A Hundred Years* (October 1986), page 52. The article is reprinted in full below, pages 163-166.
44. Introduction to *What is a Doctor? Essays on Medicine and Human Natural History* (Philadelphia, 1980), pages 7-8.
45. *Guardian*, 19th May 1990.

ONE

An Exposition of Irresponsibility

To the Editor of *Partisan Review*,

In its September-October issue *Partisan Review* advertised a number to be devoted to the discussion of certain tendencies of thought which it described as obscurantist. These include the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach to ethics and politics, the belief in the concept of Original Sin, and the denial of historical progress as an inevitable development. In the generation of English writers from 1938 onwards, the writers whose first significant work has appeared since European war was declared, the concepts which you mention are becoming gradually more and more the guiding principles of both thought and art. Belonging to that generation myself, I am personally conscious of the influence of these assertions and denials in my own experience: I am unable to regard them as retrograde. We have passed so recently through a period of classicism, in which the historical and scientific approach was made the basis of poetry, that we are in a position to realise some at least of its limitations. I am unable to find any comparable classicism in recent American poetry, except in so far as it is derived from Auden.

I should first explain what positive view I hold of the nature of the historical process in art. I regard the periods of English literature as an alternation between the classical and the romantic outlook on thought and on writing. It is as if the awareness of the significance of death as a factor in interpretive art became alternately emphasised and obscured. The classical periods are periods of security, economic and mental, where the drive is towards action and where the majority of the people are in possession of a satisfactory interpretation of the universe and of themselves, provided either by religion or by political theory. They are periods in which the burden of realising and interpreting the conflict between factual death and the human desire for the permanent devolves upon single artists, who tend to become major poets. The Victorian period was

one such, and it produced its Arnolds and Mark Rutherfords who agonised within the structure of its prejudice as much, quantitatively if not qualitatively, as did Rimbaud or Rilke in their own periods, or Unamuno and Lorca in contemporary Europe. The active periods with their extroverted public alternate regularly with periods in which realisation of human tragedy becomes generalised. In these times the *individual* experience of men like Unamuno becomes the general property not only of the majority of artists but of the majority of mankind. Major poetry, which is the vicarious function of the single artist, who takes upon himself the weight of human tragic awareness in order to shield humanity at large from its realisation, becomes quite impossible. I rather doubt if at any time in history so many ordinary individuals have realised the personal reality of death as realise it today. We are at present in the period of transition from a major period of classicism (Victorian) which produced in its turn romantic poets as individuals and finally classical poets employing the husk of romantic technique. Slack water was at about 1900, and the silence of serious art in England enabled Georgianism, a relative valley, to pass itself off as a peak. Monro couldn't understand why everyone was silent, and he shouted to fill the gap. There were two attempts to reinstate a classical approach, one in which rules still apply: the Imagists with their increasing tragic awareness, and the Audenites who expressly attempted to deny the reality of that awareness. The importance of Auden to the present generation is the assertion which he made that history is amenable to reason, and his discovery in experience that it is not. If the Spanish war was the occasion of this discovery it was not the cause. Those poets who stayed at home, or who were too young to benefit from that historical demonstration, came to exactly the same conclusion in walking about the streets of London in the course of their normal and personal activities. I don't feel that it is profitable to attempt to locate finally the point in literature in which the transition took place. Some writers have pointed to Dylan Thomas — yet his awareness of death, on his own showing, dates from childhood at a time when he was not consciously elaborating any sort of poetic experience. The question is not one of sudden transition — it is a matter of the relative numbers of those who have arrived at a frame of mind. Artists can reflect it because it is the general temper of the public, or they can explore it vicariously for the public, as doctors explore disease.

I am emphasising this quasi-priestly function which I feel that poets frequently full, and the awareness of death rather than the awareness of life not out of personal morbidity, but because to anyone who is in contact

with English writers at the moment they are omnipresent features. Like some evolutionary changes in genetics, this realisation occurs generally throughout a culture, not spreading from person to person by discussion or example, but arising in a number of places at once. In part this is the result of the general course of history, but there seems to be some less concrete influence at work. So that although one may have been elaborating the ideas in isolation, and one accepts them as *intellectual* concepts, they are emotionally conditioned. When one comes to talk to another artist who has been arriving, also in isolation, at the same ideas, one encounters a repetition of personal experience.

The conclusion which *Partisan Review* described as 'obscurantist', and which have driven us to the conscious pursuit of romanticism, are these:

> 1. That history is not a process amenable to reason. That it is not to be regarded as a steady progress in any direction, whether morally or politically defined, e.g. civilisation, goodness, socialism, but as a oscillation about a fixed point, an ebb and flow between certain fixed limits which are never exceeded. We feel very strongly that no other sort of interpretation of recorded history is reasonable. It is impossible to suggest to us that man is either morally better or politically closer to a state which does not involve the abuse of power. His achievement fluctuates sufficiently for us to say that democracy is 'better' than fascism, or Athens in 400 BC preferable to Rome in AD 50, but the statement that absolute qualitative change has taken place between 400 BC and AD 1942 has no meaning for us.
>
> 2. That because we have no belief in immortality we are not able to find any intellectual significance in human life comparable to that which the Christian (or the Marxist) finds.[1] Accordingly we accept an *emotional* analysis of history in preference to an intellectual one. We are concerned to discover the sort of principles which underlie human thought and belief as revealed in the myth, and to elaborate them as guides to our own art and conduct.
>
> 3. That one of these principles or properties common to humanity is the congenital inability not to abuse power when incorporated into any sort of body. This is roughly speaking the doctrine of Original Sin, but it has no mystical basis and there is no corresponding doctrine of Grace. One does not detect this tendency in every individual when he acts individually, but the larger the group the more obvious the tendency. One can compare

human associations to boats filled with blindfold rowers — the positive influences which would tend to goodwill or unselfishness cancel out (the boat makes no progress) but the negative and disruptive impulses summate (she sinks under the weight of her collected crew). We differ as to the degree to which education can redirect or eradicate these impulses, but we tend, I think, to feel that cultivation of the *negative* impulse is considerably easier than that of the positive (a fact which general human experience seems to admit — it is notoriously easier to be antisocial than social, or we should have our utopia on a plate, and all languages traditionally compare deterioration to a journey *down* hill). Our political attitude is modified by this belief. It owes something, but not much, to the corresponding Calvinism of Niebuhr and Karl Barth, and it recognises a penetrating allegorical statement of the impasse in Genesis, where man's inability to live up to his principles is made to coincide with his discovery of the principles themselves. But this is not in any sense a religious belief. Politically it involves the rejection of democracy, because the majority is consistently wrong, *a priori*; it also involves the rejection of fascism, because fascism is nothing more nor less than the attempt to use the negative impulses in man as a cohering force, a sort of Swedenborgian hell by common consent. We should be fascists only if we believed that the differences between positive and negative human impulses were irrelevant. On the whole, though we know no intellectual basis upon which the other one can be demonstrated to be preferable to the other, there is in our mind a sort of prejudice, whether innate or conditioned, against our own negative impulses, which, when this prejudice is not consciously operated, we obey. Accordingly there remains to us only anarchism, though not of the kind which believes in the perfectibility of human nature. In conclusion, we recognise in ourselves all the symptoms which we describe in others.

For now politically we regard ourselves as absolved. The state, having consistently shown itself to be evil, in so far as we understand at all what 'evil' means, has absolved us by its idiocy. We now bear and accept no responsibility to any group, to any body for its own sake, not even to ourselves, but only to individuals. Every bond that in past times held the single man, the sane man, to the allegiance of groups is for us nullified. Since association and incorporation can only aggravate the evil tendencies which lead to the abuse of power, it is our intention to regard as void all such associations. Those who join voluntarily or by compulsion in them have constructed worlds for themselves in which we have no part at all.

We can only regard them as negative. Accordingly we now *are* our own worlds and our own governments — our politics have been thoroughly atomised. There are no corporate allegiances any longer, only individuals and groups at continual variance with the corporate, and with all who are prepared to delegate their minds, whether to a single ruler or to a committee of rulers. That is to say, we are each of us, intellectually though not practically, a one man nation. It looks as though the sole remaining factor standing between the possibility of living a sane life and its destruction by lunatics is the disobedience of the individual.

There is only one reasonable interpretative task for the artist in contemporary society. He has placed on him the entire burden of speaking for the voiceless. Most human beings are robbed of their voices either by force or by fraud, and the artist, who keeps his own precariously, has a responsibility which outweighs all the alleged 'irresponsibility' of his attitude to maniacal institutions. The weak of this world, the raw material from which both the hostages and the firing squad, the airman and his civilian victims, the Indian and the fellow who flogs him, are recruited, are the people to whom I personally feel a responsibility. And when the sufferings of one or another are held up as a bait to induce me to inflict further suffering on others, all I can reasonably do is disobey, and lend the victims my voice. Modern literature is full of such borrowed voices — not hard-luck stories, mind you, but voices — of the soldiers who are muzzled, the people whose sons are taken, the decent folk who are led up the garden path — and, since they have undergone the final indignity, of the dead. Responsible writers are the diametrical opponents of the Goebbels and Brackens of this world whose aim is to deprive men of speech. It is in this field that we redeem our irresponsibility.

This is an outlook which is forced upon us partly by history and partly by the conclusions we have reached concerning the nature and character of Man. It is illogical in that it does not even provide for an efficient corporate town drainage. But in a nation at war it is, for the artist, the only workable way of living. However illogical it is, all other attitudes seem more so. We are deriving perpetual benefit from the society which we are trying to deny, but we can do no other. It should be stressed that we are aware of the extent to which our attitude depends upon the things which it renounces for its food and livelihood. But both in a wartime democracy or in a totalitarian state this same atomisation is an almost inevitable process for all those who value interpretive art or intellectual liberty. It is incorrect to suggest that we have *seceded* from society. It has ejected us, by its refusal to grant the fundamental conditions which we

are entitled to lay down in the capacity of artists. At present we are living on in English society partly without the landlord's knowledge and partly because he is too kind-hearted to chuck us out. It is not possible to see at present which way the historical trends will go.

Life and Letters Today, October 1943

1. There is no room here to go into the eschatology of Marxism; I have done so elsewhere: but it seems to me to assume a system of ethics based on absolute statements while denying the principle of absolutes — in other words it preaches an altruism which it fails to justify by reason and is unwilling to regard as emotional.

Two

October, 1944

The war is not over, but we can see the end of it. Millions of citizens everywhere are looking for a reprieve. Many of them will get it. Secret diplomacy is concocting the peace — we shall subscribe to it and be put back in our boxes. Intelligent people debate whether we shall occupy Germany for five, fifty or five hundred years. The intellectuals of the Allies seem to have been so far taken in by their own propaganda that they look as Germans shyly and are half relieved to find they have no tails or horns. The most fantastic aspect about the impending peace will be the speed with which the nonsense which it is a moral duty to believe in wartime will be forgotten: its consequences, the material commitments undertaken under the influence of the same nonsense, will not be so easy to escape. Few people can remember what a good thick newspaper feels like. I saw a few days ago *The Times*, of September 1st 1939, where the great blank squares of the crossword puzzle looked antique and ridiculous. Few people can remember what it was like to be sane, to live in a world where one could not earn a decoration for butchering a few thousand civilians, where a good many national heroes would have

qualified for the gallows and the mental hospital and where a single news bulletin of the present time would have produced nation-wide nausea and vomiting.

The commitments have been undertaken secretly, but even if they had been publicly discussed, what sort of frame of mind are we in to endorse them? In five years they will look like cheques which one signed when one was drunk. The operatic bellowing and the Siegfried attitudes cannot survive the criticism of sobriety, but they are going to determine the militarisation and death of ourselves and our children. Everyone knows that, under this froth of drivel and bombast. People try half-heartedly to prolong the suspension of thought — to name towns after the scenes of enemy atrocities, to keep bloodstains permanent. We know perfectly well what is coming, and we dread the end of the paroxysm more than the paroxysm itself, because we dread the restitution of our sense of shame. Even the sanest and most objective novelists are afraid to think how their work will read in five years. The German people, emerging from an even longer nightmare than our own, will try even harder than we to continue to embrace it. We and they will want more liquor, more morphia, and we shall not be able to get it. The dignified crusades for New Orders and World Liberation will not be able to remain topics for sane discussion — we shall see the bloody, purposeless delirium as we see those brilliant ideas that occur to us in dreams, as amazing, terrifying irrationalities. Unlike dreams they have left their physical effects.

It has been fashionable to stress the uniqueness of the war. The uniqueness of every war is stressed, as a means of inducing the combatant peoples to swallow it, and the present war shows the political phases which have characterised all such adventures since radical ideas compelled military leaders to procure a measure of public support. There is the phase of preliminary salesmanship, in which the necessary sceneshifting is undertaken. There is the phase of commitment ('no retreat is possible') and there is the phase of undisguised deterioration based on hatred, which conflict has provided with much material, and which, in the present instance, was liberally helped out with atrocity propaganda. That first phase of reconciliation, of creating an atmosphere of noblesse oblige, a mental offensive which is almost always directed against the intellectuals for choice, was ridiculously easy in 1939. It was the intellectuals themselves who had stressed the brutality of fascism, had published its misdeeds when the government was actively engaged in concealing them, who had voluntarily gone to fight against it in Spain. The task of a government that wishes to make war is to abolish the sense of personal

responsibility among its subjects. It was possible in 1939 to depict a European war as a responsible course of action. It was possible to appeal to every section of the community, from the least to the most intelligent, in varying degrees of truth or falsehood. Atrocity propaganda was needless. The atrocities had been voluntarily reported in spite of every official effort to suppress them.

A very substantial burden of responsibility rests on these intellectuals. They continued to repeat their belief in a war against fascism in the face of every evidential consideration which could possibly be presented to them. They have the record of the allied governments in the matter of China, India, Spain, Germany, Japan. They have the successive utterances of all the war leaders. It is not as if they do not know their men — they have had ample opportunity of watching these anti-fascists at work in condoning fascism at every possible or profitable opportunity. Yet for five years they have supported actions more and more irresponsible, closer and closer to those which, in Spain, brought them out to fight. They have repeated with the pertinacity of Gadarene swine that this was a war against fascism, and that if it were not they would make it one. If Al Capone and Charles Peace, making no secret of their record, were to come and demand their savings for hospital Sunday, would they subscribe? Evidently they would, in the hope that this time they might be sincere. They have sacrificed their lives, their art and their ideas to the Anti-Fascist War, they have acted on the highest international motives, but they have as surely sacrificed their responsible attitude to humanity by cheering Hamburg and Harris as they would have done by cheering Himmler and Lidice. They have utterly failed to learn the lesson of war.

This war has not been unique. Its lesson is identical with the lesson of every previous war. The record of it is the record of the incredible, somnambulant heroism of the people of both sides, and the bestiality, corruption and idiocy of their governments. The outcome of it has been the same outcome as in every previous war — the peoples have lost it. Every sacrifice made in it is futile, every citation of the enemy's brutality is made to justify the adoption of similar brutality. No matter what external semblance of justice a war may bear in its first days, these conclusions are the ineluctable result of the abandonment of personal responsibility. One is tempted to say — 'Learn them, remember them, you will need to know them again, as they are your only footrule'. It will be a new just cause next time and when they begin to say 'look, injustice' you must reply 'whom do you want me to kill?'

Yet the war has been unique in one respect. It has shown as never

before that society is the enemy of man — not one society, capitalist or socialist, but all society, and that in peace as in war the only final safeguard of freedom is the willingness of the individual to disobey. Fascism may or may not have been destroyed, but it is becoming abundantly clear that the partisan in peace will have the same rôle as the partisan in war. Society is rooted today in obedience, conformity, conscription, and the stage has been reached at which, in order to live, you have to be an enemy of society. The giant enemy of the next ten years will not be a class but society. The choice is not between socialism and fascism but between life and obedience. Every atrocity of the war was the direct consequence of somebody obeying when he should have thought. We have to learn the lesson of resistance, evasion, disappearance, which the occupation taught the people of France. Our own government, if it wants to make butchers or bomber pilots of our children, is as much our enemy as the Germans ever were. We have to unlearn what we have been taught — it may be dodging the column, but if the column if going to Lidice *via* Hamburg, then we do better in dodging it than obeying. The Churchills and Hitlers of this world are the essential products of the state in the total divorce between their pretension and their action, and their own utter inability to comprehend the mature quality and results of their action.

Yes, everyone who has mitigated and excused this war, English, French or German, has something to answer for. The most offensive figure of the period has been the professional sycophant; not the *Sunday Express* yellowbelly, but the poet or the dramatist recruited as a salesman to his fellow intellectuals, a merchant of a better class of goods than the gutter press, dealing in reticent atrocities coupled with sensible doubts about the cruder falsehoods, dealing in applause at the air massacre, coupled with a little peroration about military necessity; peddling the sort of apologetic patriotism that does not insult the intelligence nor affect the conscience. And the rest, the unhired intellectuals, the editors and the critics — where have they been? *Horizon* is full of gratitude that through four years of war not one word has been censored. Who the mischief wants to censor it? Has it not believed in the Great Anti-Fascist War and the graven image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up? It has busily maintained intellectual morale and quieted the intellectual conscience, and its service to the war has been very nearly equal to its service to literature. Everyone enjoys freedom provided they do not use it responsibly. Even Koestler, the finest novelist in this country at the moment, has to dress his atrocity stories up as psychoanalytical dreams, so as to leave an escape

route if they turn out to be untrue. I am not doubting Koestler's integrity and talent. If anyone knows what fascists and others can do to their political opponents, he does. But he typifies the dilemma of the anti-fascist intellectual, kept as a tame animal by a war government whether he likes it or not. It is not that what they have believed is rendered retrospectively untrue — it is that they know, inwardly, that they must either deny what they fought for, or lend colour to a palpable swindle. They have been unable to take the final step into objectivity — 'it is not fascism or communism that makes atrocities, but society'. An atrocity is no more than a grossly irresponsible action, the sort of action which one performs out of allegiance to an acephalous cause. So the sycophant grows fat, and the honest anti-fascist passes through varying degrees of mental agony. If I say that it would have been better to have lost the war, and learned thereby to be enemies of society, then to have won it and to be integrated, *gleichgeschaltet*, those who have been through this agony will understand me. We know that murder is real, atrocities are real, because we have forgiven it. In the battle for responsible action we have learned that only the single, isolated, unarmed partisan, relying on his wits, is able to act responsibly, and if society catches up with him, that is good-night — he catches a bullet or a BBC post, as if he had caught smallpox — the army of decent individuals, the somnambulists of freedom lost a fighter and close up the gap. It is not only the fascists who destroy people. Society is a machine for doing that very thing.

When the ordinary man acquiesces in war, he does so because he has been persuaded that he is defending himself — and in doing so he fails to recognise the urgent need to defend his home, his person and his family against his own government. It is difficult to see what worse impositions the 'enemy' could make than those which are made by his self-styled and self-appointed defenders — to separate him forcibly and for years from his family, compel his wife to work in heavy industry for the commercial profit of its proprietors, remove his children or permit them to grow up as illiterate savages, employ him in interminable foreign campaigns where he will have the opportunity of encountering every physical and mental torment, or in interventionist adventures against the workers of other countries, and return him home, if he is fortunate, to an old wife and children he has never seen, privileged to inhabit some sort of shack, if he can afford it. 'But the enemy would torture or imprison him ...' Conceptions of torture vary. They would not torture him if he obeyed them, and what would his own government do if he were to disobey? 'He will be fighting for his children's freedom...' To go through

the same bloody swindle in twenty years? To rot for people so nugatory that they mistake an operatic attitude like Unconditional Surrender for a policy, so fatuous even in their own dirty work that every speech they make is a direct encouragement to the enemy to go on fighting, moral and intellectual eunuchs who cannot even recognise the lies they tell for their own ends? When a government intends war, then the attitude of the ordinary man who lives in its jurisdiction must be the same as it would be towards a foreign invader. Both are his enemies.

The Maquis of the war may allow themselves to be reabsorbed into the structure of citizenship. We will be the Maquis of peace. They have shown us that it can be done — that we can keep the shell of society while devouring its heart and undermining its tyranny. Our only weapon is responsibility. Murder and sabotage are not responsible weapons — they are the actions of desperate men or imbeciles. We are desperate men but not imbeciles. We do not refuse to drive on the left hand side of the road, or to subscribe to national health insurance. The sphere of our disobedience is limited to the sphere in which society exceeds its powers and its usefulness. The chief of these excesses, the most impertinent and insupportable, is conscription. It is also the easiest to defy. I believe that in the interval of exhaustion which elapses between this war and the next we can so undermine that calf-like obedience which made possible 1914 and 1939 that when next the irresponsibles try to make it bear their weight, it will precipitate them into the filth where they deserve to be. Everyone who attempts to make war, or to make the peoples acquiesce in war, is as much our enemy as the Germans. We must remember that, and direct ourselves accordingly. Up till now, it has been an article of pride among English politicians that the public would shove its head into any old noose they might show it — unflinching steadfast patriotism, unshakeable morale — obedience and an absence of direct action. When enough people respond to the invitation to die, not with a salute but a smack in the mouth, and the mention of war empties the factories and fills the streets, we may be able to talk about freedom. I do not expect or hope for this. I only know what I myself am going to do. The people learn slowly, and learn incompletely. They remain somnambulists, but the pressure of the times moves them. They will be loudly congratulated after the Peace, and quietly diddled after that. But they are learning the lessons of the war, not unique lessons, but as old as humanity, the lessons of responsibility and disobedience.

***NOW*, 1944**

THREE

Anarchism and Law

The prosecution of the four London Anarchists is not an isolated act of political repression, it marks a stage in the social evolution of law in this country, a process of which historians are more aware than jurists. Law is the expression of the common conscience of mankind — laws are the expression of the civilisation that produces them: the history of the constitutional development of law is the history of the forms of society and the conceptions of social order that accompany them in turn. As social institutions produced in succession the legal institutions of the country, as the rise of free cities led to a systemised body of common law, as monarchy and unified government led to the establishment of the King's Peace, so the industrial revolution and the creation of a proletariat led to the rise of a body of statute law defending property, and so the rise of the megalopolitan military state, with its attendant conscription and wars, leads to the gradual supersession of common law and statute by the rule of the order-in-council, the ukase and the political police. Every society creates its new offences — as feudalism created vagrancy, Victorian capitalism created forgery, the enclosures created the Game Laws, so the transition from megapolis to tyrannopolis, the regeneration of barbarism, created as its chief offences dissent, sedition and desertion. Justice consists in the interpretation of laws in the light of law, and European civilisation is rapidly approaching the point at which the conscience of human life and experience, embodied in law, is irreconcilable with the laws enacted by the state. In Germany, the collapse of judicial institutions occurred with suddenness and finality. In this country it has been delayed solely by the independence of the courts, which rests and has rested upon the resistance of the public at large, through recalcitrant individuals, to the rise of non-judicial conceptions of law. It is in this struggle that the case of the Freedom Press is an episode, as significant in the context of events as the case of *R. vs. Wilkes*, for in it, and in similar cases, the judiciary is facing the issue of its status in future English society.

The courts must decide, in this and in future prosecutions, whether they will maintain the legislature or the law, whether they will maintain the independent status which they have so far maintained — and which in the persons of the judges they continue to maintain — or whether

they will submit to become executive in function. No historical process is inevitable. Because we are involved in a continental landslide into barbarism and military dictatorship, we need not resign ourselves. If the public, in the persons of political recalcitrants, will maintain the law, if the courts will maintain it, English traditions are strong enough in freedom and law to resist the threat of political police and of licensed printing, of conscription and suppression, but the courts and the people, realising their common danger, must maintain each other.

We have no constitution which the judicature can employ to restrain the legislature. They can restrain it only by their decisions, based upon the mass of legal tradition and the support of the people at large. The legal fiction whereby the Crown is the repository of justice, the ultimate judge whom the judges represent, has been maintained and protected from abuse by the fact that where the Crown and its judges have been in conflict, and the people have upheld the judges, the political power of the judicature has been sufficient to safeguard its independence. The legislative voice which now speaks in the name of the Crown is no longer a judicial voice — it is the voice of political adventurers controlling a megalopolitan military state. The voice of the Defence Regulations is nominally the voice of the Crown — it is practically the voice of an irresponsible political caucus which has not even undergone the formality of popular election during the last nine years. The judges are constitutionally bound to accept the dictates of the Crown. Today its dictates and ordinances stand in violation of the principles of justice. The decisions of the courts are the last barrier between the autocracy of the legislature and the constitutional bases of law. It is to the Crown that the allegiance of soldiers is due, and it is from the Crown that, in *R. vs. Richards and others*, that allegiance is alleged to have been seduced. If the Crown is represented by a clique of military adventurers — if it is represented by fascists of anti-semites, by anti-libertarians or megalomaniacs, if it is represented, as is conceivable, by a dictator in whom power has been vested by a majority vote of Parliament, then the courts alone, pursuing not the laws but the principles of law which they have in the past so courageously asserted to be binding on the Crown itself, have a voice loud enough to prevent the corruption of justice.

If anarchism is the recognition of ultimate personal responsibility, then anarchism is also the origin and quintessence of law, not its opponent. The emphasis of anarchist thought is upon the original principle of all jurisprudence — that the individual human being has, by virtue of his existence and his manhood, rights which are inalienable and respon-

sibilities which cannot be delegated. The conception of natural law, upon which, according to Blackstone, jurisprudence is founded, is in its essence an anarchist conception. The conception of common law, the existence of a body of custom recognised by common consent and common conscience to be in accordance with human rights and human duties, is an anarchist conception. The recognition of the responsibility which a human being bears for all those actions which influence the lives and affect the fortunes of other men is the starting point of anarchist ethics. The conflict between anarchism and law which has arisen in this case, and which will continue to arise in a more and more exacerbated form, is due not to the irresponsibility of anarchists but to the corruption of the universal ideas of equity by irresponsible statute-making. Where anarchists come into conflict with the legal system, it is not because they are opposed to the conception of law, but because the system of law with which they are in conflict is at variance with human conscience. There are in existence today two conflicting systems of law: one which represents the body of human will and experience, and the other which exists solely to maintain the authority of the state against that will and against that experience. The public at large is aware of the discrepancy. Let a London crowd see the police chasing a thief, and they will collar the thief not because they are fulfilling a common-law duty but because the prevention and prohibition of these are products of normal human will and experience. Let them see an escort chasing a deserter, and they will trip the redcaps. The public shows a more accurate awareness of the powers which law can and cannot arrogate to itself than any of the professional jurists. They do not need to read Blackstone to know that "no laws are binding on the subject that assault the body or violate the conscience". Learned judges who point out that the multiplicity of wartime regulations tend to bring law and justice into contempt do not carry the distinction to its conclusion. They are aware, but often only very dimly aware, that it is to the maintenance of common law rights, or, if you prefer it, of human conscience against the state and its encroachments that they owe their right to give judgment in relative political independence. If there had been no anarchists, they would not be upon the bench where they now sit. English justice owes more to Wilkes and William Penn than to any legislator or body of legislators.

In the submission of anarchist political theory, law is a normal and desirable feature of free societies, but the state and statute law, imposed by a political majority, is not. A court which upheld the absolute validity of statutes would deliver itself into the hands of the legislature as a purely

passive and executive instrument. It would bind itself to accept the natural legality of any act of government from the Parliamentary Bill that provided to boil the Bishop of Rochester's cook in oil to a statute legalising cannibalism. In the submission of the defence these courts which have upheld the right of the State to assault the person and violate the conscience of individual subjects by military conscription, by indefinite internment on security grounds, and by the suppression of free political controversy in any section of the community, uniformed or not, have already committed themselves to uphold most of the apparatus of fascism and to deny the elementary principles of legal theory. The courts have no control over the complexion of the government. If they oblige themselves to uphold it, they have no means of controlling any abuse which it may commit, however extreme its complexion. If a fascist government is returned by the electorate, then they will uphold fascism. If a government, duly elected, outlawed all Jews, then they will uphold anti-Semitism. If such a government abolishes law courts and judges, then they will voluntarily wind themselves up. In the submission of the defence, courts which have committed themselves in this way forfeit their right to be treated as legitimate sources of precedent. It is not that in the present case judgments upholding Defence Regulations of this kind are distinguishable — they are in the fullest sense illegal. It is difficult to believe that, whatever the political future, the judgement of Atkin, L.J., dissenting from the enforcement of Regulation 18B will not be the accepted precedent in law, if law is continue to be something other than mere political execution. Mansfield, L.C.J., at least had no doubts about the matter, when he ruled "I care not for the supposed dicta of judges, however eminent, if they be contrary to all principle". The arbitrary use of Defence Regulations, framed for another object, to ventilate political spite and to suppress political dissidents is contrary to all principle, and if the courts uphold it, then it is the courts that will be discredited, not the principle that will be legalised.

Whatever we may feel about the nature and substance of sedition, the employment against it of Regulations 39A at the present stage of the war, and in the present circumstances, can have no conceivable justification. Why were proceedings not instituted against the Freedom Press under Sections 1 and 2 of the Incitement to Disaffection Act 1934 — a comprehensive and dangerous enough measure if its application is not restricted by the courts? Under this Act a warrant sufficient for the purposes of the case may be granted by a judge on sworn testimony — yet the Special Branch prefers to rely upon the powers granted by

Parliament for the sole object of suppressing foreign fifth-column activity in the fact of a threat of invasion, to apply to a Superintendent of their own for a warrant, and having done so exceed the powers even of that warrant by seizure of material bearing no relevance to the charge, and by uttering defamatory remarks about the accused to their employers, and, it seems likely, to the landlords of their premises. It is difficult to see what further impropriety, short of conducting the trial before Mr Morrison in person, they could reasonably have committed. If they failed to apply to a Justice for warrants, it is unreasonable to assume that they did so knowing full well that no Justice would grant them on the evidence at their disposal? It is not only the liberty of the accused which is jeopardised by such proceedings, but the independence of the judges. The whole performance is an insult to the judicature as a whole.

And what is 'disaffection'? The statutory discussion of duty to His Majesty is as irrelevant as the argument about villeinage which Lord Mansfield rejected — the loyalty of soldiers to His Majesty is not in question. The rights which the prosecution is attempting to claim are these — that the government should have the power to impose compulsory service in any section of the community, and, having done so, demand from them obedience to any orders however criminal or improper — and further to render the discussion of such orders, or the dissemination of any political opinion hostile to their givers, a penal offence. That is the sum of the prosecution's demands. Their zeal for unquestioning obedience in their own military forces is only equalled by their indignation at the obedience of German troops when their government ordered them to commit atrocities. The German people are responsible as a whole — if they obey, they are to be treated as criminals; but English troops must not even discuss their instructions — the government which commands them is above such criticism. It would never commit an atrocity. The impudence of this claim is almost equal to its illegality. It has been ruled that anyone may censure the conduct of servants of the Crown provided that he does so without malignity. There is no exception to excluding civilians placed compulsorily in uniform. In the modern political state the conception of unquestioning obedience to the Crown is an anachronism. To uphold it in the context of the Sedition Acts is to disenfranchise all soldiers, to abolish their state of citizenship for as long as they are in the army. We contest the right of Sir James Grigg to accept the duty of these men to sacrifice their lives, their homes and their liberty, while rejecting their right of free access to all political ideas and all political activities. We contest an interpretation which will mean that

for an historian to describe the execution of King Charles I is tantamount to incitement to treason. The object of this prosecution is to restrict the expression of political opinions unfavourable to the government, and to the Minister of War in person, both by and to something like twenty per cent of the electorate. It can have no other object. The claim that any opinions, however malignant, which the four accused anarchists might circulate among troops, could at this stage influence the course of the war to the detriment of the Allies is too puerile to require a reply.

We did no seek out this conflict, but neither will we shirk it. Let there be no mistake about it — it is not the victims of this prosecution but its sponsors who stand convicted. It is we who are the accusers. If accusations of treason are to be made — and the charges which have been brought by the Attorney-General are in substance accusations of treason — we have our own charges to bring. Charges of disaffection come ill from renegades and placemen. Charges of corrupting the morale of the army come ill from ministers who have done more than any anarchist could hope to do to shake the faith of the army in the cause for which it accepted service. It is we, through the persecution of our four comrades, who will take the duty of accusation upon our shoulders. We will accuse the accusers: we will accuse them on behalf of the peoples of the entire world, whose confidence they have betrayed and whose lives and liberties they have wantonly destroyed. We will accuse them on behalf of the German Democrats, whose tormentors they entertained as guests. We will accuse them on behalf of the people of Spain, whose cause they calumniated and whose subjection they financed and sponsored. We will accuse them on behalf of the people of India, whose rights they have suppressed by violence and starvation, and whose country they have converted into a prison. We will accuse them on behalf of the citizens of Turin, of Calais, of Hamburg, of Tokyo, of Berlin, whose cities they burned and whose children they massacred: on behalf of the millions whom their fraudulent war has destroyed and the thousands that it will still destroy: by every falsehood they have told, by every liar they have suborned, by every progressive idea that they have stifled and betrayed and every instrument of tyranny that they have supported and advocated: by their fictitious Atlantic Charter, which they now own as a canard: by every drop of blood and sweat, and tears *we* will indict *them* as traitors to the very conceptions of human liberty and law which they have the impudence to assume.

***War Commentary*, 5th May 1945**

Four

Criminal Lunacy Exposed

We have just witnessed an act of criminal lunacy which must be without parallel in recorded history. A city of 300,000 people has been suddenly and deliberately obliterated and its inhabitants murdered by the English and American governments. It is difficult to express in coherent language the contempt and shame which we feel. That this thing should be done in our name makes us feel physically bespattered with the filth of it. Even a public slowly and deliberately accustomed by propaganda to acquiesce to irresponsible murder is stricken by it. We have dissented and protested in the past, but the time for dissent and protest are over. The men who did this are criminal lunatics. Unless this final atrocity is irrevocably and unquestionably brought home to them by public opinion, we have no claim to be human beings, we have no right to condemn any excess of the past or the future, we do not deserve any vestige of freedom.

No alliance of nations fostering such pretensions has ever covered itself with such utter disgrace. The sickening cant about indiscriminate bombardment, the lies about liberty and justice, have appeared for what they are — the restoration of moral order for what it is, a death's head. This action is not to be judged by men — men will be judged by it, as they were judged by the atrocities of Dachau: the only question that will be asked is — 'Did you resist it to your utmost?' One need only consider how last Monday's announcement would have affected the nation if it had been made in 1937 to realise how profoundly our responsibility has degenerated, and how much of the practice of fascism has been sold to us since then. An endless iteration of enemy brutality has been used to acclimatise us to crimes which have now reached the magnitude of this massacre.

The only remedy which is possible to us, if we are to remain human beings and not be lepers in the eyes of every decent person and every period of history, is the condign punishment of the men who are responsible. Not one political leader who has tolerated this filthy thing, or the indiscriminate bombardment of Germany which preceded it, should be permitted to escape the consequence of what he has done. Apart from the fantastic irresponsibility of scientists who are prepared to put such a

weapon into the hands of our present rulers, the responsibility for seeing that no political or military figure associated with this action shall be permitted to remain rests upon us. It is high time that we tried our own war criminals, or history will rightly and justly try and condemn us to permanent hatred and contempt.

War Commentary, **25th August 1945**

FIVE

An Anarchist View: The Political Relevance of Pacifism

It was not more than two years ago, when the true characteristics of fascism were being brought home for the first time to a good many of its former supporters, that we were hearing it confidently reiterated that pacifism could have no conceivable future for the intelligent or the politically relevant individual. I have a feeling that since the events of August last we shall hear that remark with decreasing frequency.

The atomic bomb is not different in kind or in result from the other weapons and methods of war which characterise contemporary society, but it has sharpened and kindled the awareness of a large section of the public to the nature and historical consequences of those weapons and methods. The conclusions of anti-militarist thought have ceased to be personal theories — they have become the subject of normal street discussion. It seems to me that the political pacifists are the only people who emerge from the present war vindicated wholly and in detail. Political prophets must be judged by the accuracy of their predictions — there is no other standard that one can reasonably apply. And the outcome of the Second World War has confounded every one of its political advocates, and signally justified the predictions of its political opponents.

The democratic Allies have disgraced themselves more completely in

the sight of historical libertarianism than any coalition which ever uttered a pretension or broke a promise. They have debauched public opinion, they have reduced indiscriminate bombardment to an art in which one bomb can destroy more persons than passed in ten years through the fascist prison camps — they have debased the currency of humanity to a level lower than that of the fascists themselves, because they have debased it in the name of human liberation. Fascism was the conscious and voluntary adoption of an irrationalism which lies at the root of all irresponsible societies, and the practice of that irrationalism in the field of public ethics is no less inevitable because we choose to repudiate it. The savagery of the Japanese in their treatment of prisoners was less serious as a social phenomenon than the savagery of our own civilian massacres in Japan and Germany, for if the first was the ethical product of the zoo, the second was, like Maidenek and Belsen, the ethical product of the mental hospital.

The confusion of the war's progressive apologists was completed in the fact that the final and most cynical act of irresponsibility occurred in the Far Eastern War. To anti-militarists of all kinds the Western War was at least equivocal in its morality — the foulness of fascism was not in dispute. But the war against Japan had not even the equivocal factor of an ideological background. It was an imperialist war without a single redeeming feature. The troops against which it was fought are now disarming recalcitrant populations in the combat zone. Yet this was the journey which we were to accept because along it lay the road to international amity, because the individual was powerless against the resources of the total state unless he were prepared to rely on military liberation, because even if we were walking on corpses, we were walking to a responsible conception of statesmanship.

Every one of those predictions was false. We are confronted with a situation more menacing than that of 1938, with a Europe divided between mendacious and irresponsible gangs, with injustice which differs only from the injustice of the Nazis in that it is done in our name, with the knowledge than the conception of the repressive state must be fought over again by those individual techniques and that individual disobedience which alone have succeeded in the war years in achieving results that were not self-cancelling. We have seen the collapse of the moral pretensions of this country, in the massacre of Europe's civilians, of America and the pronouncements of its tycoon-politicians and in the atom bomb, of Russia in the betrayal of libertarian socialism which is dismaying even her warmest supporters. The historical vindication of

the pacifist case could not be more complete under laboratory conditions.

It has been ably argued from these facts that since the accessions of technical power which over the last forty years have placed in the hands of the state, and the tremendous complexity of these resources, resistance to authority has ceased to be possible. George Orwell in particular has drawn attention to the relation between democratic ages and democratic weapons, easily-made and easily mastered, and fears a stable and irresistible system of tyrannies, founded on nuclear energy and atomic weapons. But it has been the contention of political pacifism that at the practical level war has long ceased to be effective as a revolutionary force, because of the concentration of power into the hands of the established powers.

Yet the essence of these new weapons is their lack of ideological character and their relative futility against individual recalcitrance. The record of the European resistance movements had proved abundantly that the weapons of authority against disobedience now are precisely what they were under Nebuchadnezzar or Nero — terrorism, propaganda, police repression, mass execution. In the presence of the atom bomb no armed revolution can succeed. Yet the very complexity of such weapons and of the society which produces them makes that society more vulnerable to individual resistance than any which has gone before. Faced with the threat of modern war, the only community capable of resisting military forces will be that which cannot be absorbed or overawed because of the individual disobedience of its members.

The political relevance of pacifism has never stood higher, if we wish it. It can forfeit that relevance only if it is betrayed into bartering acquiescence for toleration — into putting itself into prison and guarding itself as the price of individual exemption, as certain American pacifist bodies seem to have done. Political pacifism must move from objection, which is apolitic, into resistance — it is not enough to argue with tyranny for recognition, it must be steadily and honestly defied. The liberal tradition of Europe rests without exaggeration in the hands of those who are ready to resist war and conscription, and every invasion of the rights and responsibilities of man. We are the sole revolutionary movement which does not carry in itself the seeds of post-revolutionary tyranny. The PPU with its pledge of individual refusal may have made mistakes, and I have attacked in the past what I conceived to be its mistakes, but upon some such withdrawal of support, among minorities such as scientists or as a majority movement of resistance, depends the future defeat of barbarism everywhere.

***Peace News*, 7th December 1945**

SIX

Art and Social Responsibility

He [Josef Kramer] wasn't a bad chap really ... He simply couldn't see what he had done wrong in obeying orders ... — PRESS REPORT

Le règne de la poésie est peut-être plus proche que je n'ose le penser. Que restera-t-il aux vivants de demain? Leurs yeux pour pleurer, des mauvaises herbes et des fleurs des champs, une terre ravagée, des cabanes au fond des bois, un carré de ciel, et des sentiments violents. Pour un poète, les conditions necessaires et suffisantes. — RAYMOND DUMAY

I

Partisan Review, published in New York, advertised this year[1] a number to be devoted to exposing the 'New Failure of Nerve' in Western liberalism. The advertisement catalogued a series of the tendencies which the editors regarded as retrograde, obscurantist, reactionary. They included the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach to politics and ethics, a return to the idea of Original Sin, and the appearance once again of the semi-deterministic conception of sociology. It struck me that so many of these concepts were, in fact, the principles of thought and art which are tending more and more to guide the artists who have begin to appear publicly since the war broke out; belonging to that generation, I am perfectly aware of the influence of such ideas on myself. I have examined them fairly often, and whether out of personal prejudice or out of conviction I must refuse to admit that they are in essence obscurantist principles. We have just passed through a period of classicism in English poetry which has no parallel in American work, and we have seen a few of its limitations. History has driven us from classicism to romanticism, and the migration has been almost universal among sensitive writers.

I do not believe that the conflict between human beings and society is the product of the Industrial Revolution, socialism, fascism, or any other contemporary cause — it is as old as the hills, and the common man knows it well enough. He has not been bludgeoned into the armies of eight or nine millennia for nothing. The reason that the existence of such

a conflict requires mention in this essay is that for the first time in a good many years the creative artist, who has previously, by reason of his occupation, contrived to dodge the issue and claim special privileges, is finding himself involved. The end of regionalism liberated him from it; the collapse of urban centralisation confronts him with it again. Just as friars contrived to escape being impressed to fight at Crecy, artists have contrived, and still are contriving, if they are prepared to sell their humanity, to avoid the issue of accepting society or rejecting it. To the peasants of Alsace or China none of this would need saying — they know armies and causes for what they are — but to a great many writers, those of *Partisan Review* included, brought up in an essentially urban culture, who have no such timeless, hereditary awareness of disobedience, it badly needs saying. In England, at any rate, the realisation of the active irresponsibility of society has come as such a thunderbolt to writers reared in an atmosphere or socialism (as we were) that they have had no time to make up their minds. Caught on the wrong foot, they have postponed the decision, either by preparing 'to defend the bad against the worse', or, far less creditably, by using their status as artists to detach themselves from general conscription, which is somewhat comparable with the action of the doctor who claims priority air transport away from a cholera epidemic, because he is an important asset to society.

These terms, classic and romantic, stand for more than differences of style. The classic sees man as master, the romantic sees him as victim of his environment. That seems to me to be the real difference. I regard the periods of English literature as an alternation between these two concepts. It is as if the awareness of death, the factor which, at root, determines the degree to which we feel masters of our circumstances, ebbed and flowed, alternately emphasised and obscured as a factor in interpretative art. The classical periods are periods of economic and mental security, when the drive is towards action and where the majority of the people is in possession of a satisfactory interpretation of the universe and of themselves, religious or political (it can be either). They are periods during which the burdens of realising and interpreting the most ghastly of all conflicts, between the man's and the artist's desperate desire for permanence, and factual death which he discovers, fall upon individual shoulders. These artists, standing in a period of general complacency, are the major poets — frequently psychopathic, since their insecurity is endogenous. The Victorian period was one such, and it produced its Arnolds and Mark Rutherfords who agonised as much quantitatively if not qualitatively within the structure of the times as did Rilke or Thompson,

or Unamuno and Lorca in contemporary Europe.

The active periods with their extroverted public alternate with ages when the realisation of the Tragic Sense becomes general, spreads over continents, reaches men who are conscious only of being afraid. There are no major poets, because what they have to say, everybody already knows. The times need not revealers but concealers, a hierarchy of men who will hide the truth of death from humanity, or life becomes empty. I am convinced that a large part of cultural barbarism arises from this source. Perhaps this is the true failure of nerve. Major poetry is the vicarious function of the single artist — he takes the weight of tragic awareness to shield the rest of humanity from it. I rather doubt if ever in history there have been so many who realised the emotional fact of death. Megalopolitan civilisation is living under a death sentence. That has become a personal realisation over great areas of the world. We are at the turn of a major period of classicism (Victorian) which produced major romantic poets, and finally classical poets using the husk of romantic technique. Slack water was at about 1900, and suddenly the face of social disintegration and personal death began to be seen by more and more people. The private knowledge of the Dostoievskys and Unamunos of the past was becoming general. A numb silence fell on everyone, except Monro and his Georgians, who could not understand what was happening and shouted to fill the gap. There were few attempts to reinstate a classical, secure, approach. The Imagists wrote, with increasing tragic awareness. The socialist poets attempted to deny the awareness and to turn to society, but in Spain the face of the unpleasant black figure was unveiled. The poets went out to fight, taking Marx with them, and came back with Unamuno and Lorca. It was then that the dialectical-historical approach became hollow. In some strange fashion the same knowledge, unconditioned by history, was growing up in innumerable childhoods — Dylan Thomas knew it early in life, long before the Spanish defeat. Art does not move always by sudden transition — Steiner's concept of the Zeitgeist is truer than it looks. The transition is a matter of relative numbers who reach a viewpoint together, independently. Artists reflect it now only because it is the general temper of the public.

II

The awareness of death, the quasi-priestly but secular attitude, are omnipresent for anyone who knows contemporary English art and letters. No artist of my generation is uninfluenced by them. I should make

it clear that I do not wish to argue for them, only to state that they are here. The new climate is a thing into which we grew up. The ideas that lie behind it are the obscurantist ideas of the Editor of *Partisan Review*, and analysis of what has been written suggests that they are these.

1) That there is no correspondence between the physical essence of the universe and the psychological and so-called 'spiritual' aspirations of man — that no human activity can be said to have 'permanent' or 'absolute' significance, and that ethics and aesthetics exist because we make them and assert them, not in conformity with Platonic absolutes but in the teeth of material reality. That the common enemy of man is Death, that the common tie of man is ultimate victimhood, and that anyone who, in attempting to escape the realisation of that victimhood in himself, increases its incidence upon others, is a traitor to humanity and an ally of death.

2) That history, in so far as it is the history of power, is not to be regarded as a steady progress in any direction, whether moral or political, e.g. towards civilisation, goodness, socialism, but as an oscillation about a fixed point, a series of self-limiting ecological changes, an ebb and flow between certain fixed limits which have not within human record been exceeded. We see it as a fluctuating conflict between biological freedom and power. One cannot suggest on the recorded evidence that man is either 'morally better' (however that be defined) or politically more capable of forming a society which does not involve the abuse of power. His achievement fluctuates sufficiently for one to be able to say that democracy is 'better' — i.e. more humane or less exacting — than fascism, or that the Greece of 450 BC was preferable to the Rome of AD 50, but the statement that absolute qualitative charge has taken place between 500 BC and AD 1943 is without meaning for us. Such comparisons are in themselves historically meaningless. We do not believe that irresponsible society is any less of an evil than irresponsible society then, or society when Godwin saw it. Every society based upon power is, to us, vitiated by the fact, whoever the rulers may be, and where free communities have come into existence their freedom has to be constantly asserted, or they degenerate slowly or rapidly into the adoption of power. In other words, the recurrent tendency of society is to degenerate into barbarism. We accept this hypothesis for the same reason that we call the tendency to live between fifty and eighty years a human property — evidence tends to suggest that in a majority of cases it is factually true. One does not detect the tendency so freely in individuals as the Adlerians would lead us to believe — it is not a question of individual

> lust-for-power, but a different property, belonging to masses, and able to vitiate the most enlightened decisions. It seems that in any society, acting as a society, once responsibility and mutual aid are submerged, the constructive impulses tend to cancel out, and the negative and destructive summate. This is as true of the Communist Party as it is of feudal Poland or the Roman Empire. It is as though we were to have a boat full of blindfold rowers. They pull in different directions and no progress is made, but the weights of the crew add up and she sinks. There is a good deal of argument possible whether education can in any degree remedy this tendency. One can call it original sin if one wishes. I do not care what name I give it — for me as an artist it is real, the most real feature of society in all ages. It is possible that, in reality, it is a feature of the collapse-phase only — certainly its recognition is — yet all ages speak of deterioration as a journey *down* hill. Social conduct is described as harder than its opposite. It is no new idea. But the state of irresponsibility once reached, the viciousness of an organisation tends to be proportional to its size. Democracy in a barbarian state is a priori impossible, because it involves the refusal to admit that the majority is never right. Fascism is the attempt to summate the destructive influences and to use them as a basis for a society. It teaches that the individual is unreal, and therefore death, the termination of the individual, is unreal also. If this does not explain the genuine satisfaction which all authoritarian societies give to their adherents, then I have misunderstood society. But I have no use for a Swedenborgian Hell by common consent. One cannot propel the boat by the weight of its rowers.

Romanticism is our ideology. It is based upon a metaphysical theory. The most serious difficulty in the discussion of romanticism and its place in sociological and literary criticism is the progressive loss of meaning which critical illiteracy has inflicted on the name itself. Romanticism is not a stylistic term, and the criterion of its application is not how the subject writes, but what he believes — otherwise we might find it difficult to explain the clarity and definition with which we can speak of romantic painting, romantic poetry, romantic sculpture and romantic music, with equal readiness and an exact correspondence in the quality described. It has become fashionable to deride any attempt to relate artistic criticism to cosmological theory, except among those who confuse mystical speculation with metaphysics. To attempt such a relation is one of the stigmata which characterises 'loss of nerve' in the eyes of the neo-classicists. But without coherent metaphysics art is no more a comprehensible activity than travel without a sense of direction. The nature of reality is

the first concern not only of poetry but of intelligent biology or political ethics, and the only claim of romanticism to the status of an ideology, and a historically valid ideology, lies in the coherence of its metaphysics, and its root in observed fact.

The romantic believes that the particular qualities which make up humanness — mind, purpose, consciousness, will, personality — are unique in known phylogeny, and are so far at variance with the physical conditions in which man exists that they are irrelevant to the general structure of physical reality. Christian and pagan metaphysicians of opposing ideologies (including the Marxists, who believe in historical inevitability) have contended either that Man was made in God's image, in which case ethical obligation corresponded with the nature of a Creator, or that the Universe was made in Man's image, and that some of the values to which human individuals tend to aspire (beauty, goodness or order) were incorporated in the physical universe itself. The distinguishing feature of the metaphysical theory which underlies romanticism is that it rejects the ideals themselves. They exist only so long as Man himself exists and fights for them. The entire romantic ethic and body of art rests upon this assumption of insecurity, an insecurity which begins at the personal level of mortality, and extends into all the intellectual fields where insecurity is least tolerable. It is comical that such a view should be characterised as wish-fulfilment. The romantic has only two basic certainties — the certainty of irresoluble conflict which cannot be won but must be continued, and the certainty that there exists between all human beings who are involved in this conflict an indefeasible responsibility to one another. The romantic has two enemies, Death, and the obedient who, by conformity to power and irresponsibility, ally themselves with Death. There is no hint of mysticism in this — romanticism is the ideology of a whole human being looking at the whole universe.

Romanticism, the belief in the human conflict against the Universe and against power, seems to me to be the driving force is all art and science which deserves the name. In Western civilisation today there are only two recognisable elements which can be said to differentiate it from total barbarism, our art and our medical science, and both are based upon this romantic ideology. The ethical content of romanticism has always been the same. The romantic bases his ethic upon his belief in the hostility or the neutrality of the Universe. He does not deny the existence of absolute standards, but he denies their existence apart from Man. The conceptions of artistic beauty or moral goodness did not exist before the emergence of consciousness, and they will return to oblivion with its

extinction, but they are none the less good for their impermanence. And because of this one-sided battle which the romantic believes himself to be fighting, he recognises an absolute and imperative responsibility to his fellow men as individuals — both because he, unlike the Christian, is defending standards in which he believes but which are not by nature assured of triumph, which he feels will only exist so long as they are defended, and because his pessimistic interpretation of philosophy makes him feel towards his fellow men much as you might feel towards fellow survivors on a raft.

It is from this metaphysical idea of conflict, of principles which are maintained only by struggle, that romanticism draws the tremendous force of its social and philosophical criticism, and the equally tremendous emotional and intellectual appeal of its artistic statements. It is a force which alone among artistic forces seems to preserve perpetual virility and perpetual youth. Compare the *Enthronement of Our Lady*, which Ruskin called the most outstanding work of art in the world, with the works of Brueghel and see which seems to you to be the more true — the order and peace of the first, or the tumult of the second. The ideal of beauty and order is the same in each case, but for the Italian master the battle is already won, God is on His throne. For Brueghel, in the world, in society, in his own body, the battle continued as bloody and as fierce as ever.

The romantic recognises a perpetual struggle upon two levels, the fight against Death which I have described, and the struggle against those men and institutions who ally themselves with Death against humanity, the struggle against barbarism. These are the two subjects of the Brueghel paintings, *The Triumph of Death* and *The Massacre of the Holy Innocents*. In the first, a gigantic host of skeletons is riding down mankind. In the second, the Duke of Alva's soldiery are butchering Flemish peasants and their children. I regard these paintings as the highest level which the expression of the romantic ideology has ever reached — and Brueghel is not in any lecture catalogue of romantic painters. These are the enemies of humanity, and of the standards of beauty and of truth which exist only for and in humanity — Death and Death's ally, irresponsibility. The relevance of romanticism today lies in the fact that of all ideologies it alone declares this basic antagonism and moulds its course accordingly.

I suppose that I would summarise the social conclusions of contemporary romantics in some such form as this:

> i) Man, considered individually, seems to be internally maladapted. He possesses a conscious sense of personality which, as far as one can

reasonably guess, is not shared by other organisms, and which renders the emotional realisation of death intolerable and incompatible with continued enjoyment of existence. He therefore attempts universally to deny either that death is real or that his personality is really personal.[2]

ii) At the present time, one of the main human refuges in the past (the negation of death) is apparently sealed by scientific research. I say apparently, because the important factor from the viewpoint of social psychology is not the actual evidence but the acceptance of death as real and final by a high proportion of the populations which have so far evaded the realisation.[3] This acceptance, coming upon people whose humanity has been undermined by social organisation, is a root cause of the flight into barbarism.

iii) Accordingly, the emphasis is laid more than ever before in the negation of individual personality and responsibility, since to admit that I am an individual I must also admit that I shall cease to exist. The negation takes the form of a growing belief in the conception of an immortal, invisible and only wise society, which can exact responsibilities and demand allegiances. The concept is as old as human thought, but its acceptance is becoming more and more a refuge from the reality of self. Society is not only a form of abrogating moral responsibility, it is a womb into which one can crawl back and become immortal because unborn.

iv) But we have seen that it is a property of over-specialised groups that they submerge constructive impulses and summate destructive ones, so that the product of any group[4] action is by tendency destructive and irrational. The courses of action which the group mode of thought imposes upon the individual members are so grotesque and so wildly at variance with reason and with normal constructive activity that by reference to individual standards of human responsibility they are clinically insane. The consciousness of personal responsibility is the factor which differentiates human relationships from superficially similar animal societies: and contemporary irresponsibility has thrown it overboard.

The barbarian revolution occurs without external change at the point where mutual aid becomes detached from political organisation, civic delegation passes out of the control of the delegators, at the transition between a community of responsible individuals and a society of irresponsible citizens. At a definite point in the history of every civilisation,

and shortly before its economic peak, there occurs a transfer of civic obligation, from the community based on mutual aid to the society based upon common irresponsibility. It may manifest itself as an industrial revolution, a megalopolitan development of the city, or as a change in national attitude from community to communal aggression. Every society has its Melian Dialogues, and thereafter the barbarian revolution has taken place, and the actions of that society are irresponsible, and its members insane.

The most terrible feature of this insanity is that it can be recognised in ourselves, in our friends. The man whom one knows — a good fellow, able to live as an individual a life which is free from any conscious assaults on the rights of others, who does not make a practice of beating his own head or the heads of others against the walls, who is sane, with whom one eats or drinks ... this same man can very well return one evening to talk or drink with you again and catalogue the most grotesque and contemptible actions which he has performed, or which he supports, with full approval and a fixed delusional sense of their rightness, solely because he is now acting as a member of some organised and irresponsible group. He will pay any price to rid himself of the selfhood which, subconsciously, he knows must die. It is this frantic prostration before society, this masochistic attitude which permits aggregate lunacy to torture him, kill him, or drive him to actions of unspeakable idiocy, which explains the obedience of so many populations to rogues and brutes who pull the strings and make Leviathan walk. Yet this fellow you eat and drink with is still a good fellow. If all those who supported tyranny, butchered each other, and generally raised hell and high-water, were personal blackguards, film Nazis, one could be happy. But I sat smoking last week with a great personal friend of mine who has just helped to exterminate, under orders, the population of a city where he has a good many acquaintances. He is filled with a sense of the rightness of his action, and he was willing to perform it at great personal risk. By participating in a human society, he had bought the abrogation of the fear of death at the price of his personality. He is not a fool nor a sadist — he is your friend or your son. His contact with society has made him perform an action which, a year ago, or if it had been performed yesterday by a society of which he was not a member, he would have called bestial and contemptible. He looks back on it with pride, because he has accepted it as an action on behalf of humanity.

Jailers, firing squads, thugs — the horror of it is that in many cases they owe the criminality of their acts not to themselves but to the fact

that they are members of a society and possess no insight into its corporate actions. To call them insane, over the range of those actions, is not a figure of speech but a clinical fact. If insanity is a divorce between reality and perception which, by depriving a man of insight, renders him a peril to himself and others, then these men — my friend, all of them — are insane, over the whole section of their activity which is involved with the madhouse group. What else does the tag concerning Salus Populi mean, save the society abrogates rational conduct? What else is the contemporary phrase Military Necessity but a prelude to some grotesque piece of bestiality which we are being asked to accept? We are living in a madhouse whenever society is allowed to become personalised and regarded as a super-individual. We are living in a madhouse now.

What will the artist, as an individual, have to say for himself when he looks at the results of this process in the present time? He will lay down, and I believe he is laying down, a set of cynical but reliable guides to conduct.

In a barbarian society, we are forced to live in an asylum, where we are both patients and explorers. Certain rules, arrived at empirically, will govern our conduct in terms of that analogy.

First, I recognise the seeds of madness in myself. I know that if ever, for any purpose, I allow myself to act as a member of such a group and to forfeit my responsibility to my fellows, from that moment I am a madman, and the degree of my insanity will be purely fortuitous.

Second, I must suspect all bodies, groups, teams, gangs, based on power, for where two or three hundred are gathered together, there is the potentiality of lunacy in the midst of them, whether lunacy that kills Jews, lunacy that flogs Indians, lunacy that believes Lord George Gordon or the Ku Klux Klan, or lunacy that bombs Berlin. Yet I shall not hate or distrust any of my fellow patients singly. They are exactly as I am. I can see how dangerous they are, but I can be as dangerous to them if I allow myself to become involved. It will be said that I deny social responsibility. I do not — I believe that responsibility is boundless. We have boundless responsibility to every person we meet. The foreman owes it to his men not to persecute them — he owes it as a man, not because there is an abstract power vested in the TUC which demands it. Barbarism is a flight from responsibility, an attempt to exercise it towards a non-existent scarecrow rather than to real people. Each sincere citizen feels responsibility to society in the abstract, and none to the people he kills. The furious obedience of the Good Citizens is basically irresponsible. 'The simple love of country and home and soil, a love that needs neither

reasons nor justifications, is turned by the official apologists of the state into the demented cult of "patriotism": coercive group unanimity: blind support of the rulers of the state: maudlin national egoism: an imbecile willingness to commit collective atrocities for the sake of "national glory".'[5] We have no responsibility whatever to a barbarian society (we recognise no moral duties towards a gang of madmen): our responsibilities to each other I believe to be boundless.

Third, one must aim at concealment. When lunacy is a norm, cynicism is a duty. The chief task will be to remain unnoticed by these ranging gangs of fellow patients. Their main duty falls on anybody who, by remaining a person, reminds them of personality and death. One lives in perpetual danger from the hatred or the equally destructive desire of the Good Citizens, and we shall need to humour, to cajole, to deceive, to appease, to compromise, to run at the right moments. When two of these squealing packs are murdering each other we shall be denounced by both as traitors for failing to join in. The most we can do is to attempt to snatch out of the mob one or two of the pathetic figures, urged on by scamps, who compose such mobs. They are our friends.

The positive expression of such ideas is not in the ballot box but in the individual restoration of responsible citizenship, the practice of recalcitrant mutual aid, not in political organisation but in the fostering of individual disobedience, individual thought, small responsible mutual aid bodies which can survive the collapse and concentrate their efforts upon the practice of civilisation. It is the philosophy of direct action, of the deserter and the maquis, the two most significant and human figures of every barbarian age.

In future, our responsibilities are to our fellow men, not to a society. The point at which responsibility becomes finally submerged is the point at which we no longer have common ground with society. Once the choice of barbarism has been made, the only remedy is in direct action. We now accept no responsibility to any group, only to individuals. This repudiation is not confined to 'artists' — 'artists' have made it because they happen to be human beings. They enjoy no rights that shoemakers, doctors or housewives are not equally entitled to demand. The claim of society on bakers is just as much vitiated by irresponsibility as its claim on poets. There are no corporate allegiances. All our politics are atomised.

It is not that as artists we have deserted society. It has deserted or ejected us, and we live on in contact with it as tenants whom the landlord has not troubled to have thrown out. We have not seceded, but in clinging to personality we sling to something which everyone knows is the

harbinger of death. They hate us for reminding them of it. They burrow deeper into society to lose sight of the fact which towers over them. Rather than face it, they become insane. Fascism is a refuge from Death in death. And fascism epitomises the historical tendency of barbarian society.

These are the necessary conclusions of an age in which a concept of society and of the universe — I mean the Victorian-Liberal-bourgeois concept, has collapsed. To describe them as obscurantist or a 'failure of nerve' contributes little to their discussion. They are the almost inevitable product of the time, and in practice they exercise everybody, even Marxist writers who repudiate them and find it hard to sympathise with 'romantics' who express them. They are far more a fact of social history than a result of conscious thought.

Further, they represent the conscious or unconscious state of mind of an entire generation of writers, both those who profess individualism and those who reject it. They are manifestly not identical with the ideas behind 'Art for Art's sake' — it would be far fairer to regard them as art for responsibility's sake. The generation which is influenced by such ideas is certainly making no special claims for itself, either of privilege or of insight. This set of ideas, this metaphysical and political attitude, is an ideology, and that ideology is correctly termed romanticism.

III

If this seems a cynical or a hysterical estimate of human society and of an artist's attitude to it, I feel that there is evidence, from what we have seen of history in some ten years of increasing political degeneration throughout societies whose barbarian revolution has taken place, that it may be true. Perhaps the environment was a very unfavourable one. I have lived only in a social system generally admitted to be at the end of its tether. I belong to a generation brought up in the certainty that it would be killed in action on behalf of an unreality against an insanity. But war is not a special case. The English public is madder now than in 1938 — it kills and tortures with as little scruple as its enemies did them — but war is only an aggravation of barbarism. The shock effect of such ideas as I have expressed is present only to people who, like the American and English artists of the present day, are politically and humanly semi-adult. The Chinese, the peasants of Europe, the peasants of sixteenth-century England, artists like Brueghel and Shelley, would not require their formulation. They would find them too obvious to require stating. Of course the artist is a responsible individual. It is only the artist who is

recovering from a period of dehumanised Victorianism or industrialism who needs to be reminded of them. Brueghel, unlike the intellectuals of classicism, would not have been surprised and disoriented because obedient citizens massacred Jews or Germans, because the Japanese raided Pearl Harbour. These ideas are part of the humanity which we re-learn in becoming romantics. However, the romantic is certainly obliged to face the criticism that he denounces other people's doings when he cannot say what principles guide his own actions. I say emphatically that war is wrong, and do not know why I say it. The position is illogical, but I see no way out. I cannot give so many reasons for believing any one action to be wrong as I can give for believing a work of art to be bad. Yet as I am confident that aesthetics are real, and find myself obliged to act accordingly, so in the field of ethics I must act on some of the convictions that compose humanity. The only coherent ethic is that of responsible humaneness. I believe, therefore, in reason against insanity, in responsibility against barbarism. A society of irresponsible, obedient citizens to my mind is as morally null as it is historically doomed. The ethic of romanticism is an ethic derived entirely from man, and for the artist and the scientist, concerned with humanity and nothing else, it is true and coherent. Apart from human beings, neither 'goodness' not 'beauty' have any absolute significance. They are human things and the seeking of them is a human obligation. The romantic launches his protest and bases his conduct upon an ethic, an agathistic utilitarianism, which he finds in the alliance for mutual aid of all human beings against a universe which does not exist for their comfort nor share their aspirations.

Perhaps the most important factor which has led to the widespread acceptance of romanticism today is that it offers an adequate explanation of contemporary Western society and has shown itself capable of predicting accurately the future course of that society. Man's only weapon against the anarchy of the universe is his civilisation, the responsible adoption of each individual of his social rights and duties. The growth of Western society has been coterminous with the gradual passage of these functions of justice, law, mutual aid and creative work out of the hands of individuals and into the hands of professional exponents, but never until the total unhinging of the whole system of individual civilisation by the Industrial Revolution had the ascendancy of barbarism been absolute, and the existence of a public possessing no single element of normal human activity or culture become widespread. The megalopolitan pattern is irreversible, if any historical process is irreversible, and

it was possible to predict with accuracy the total collapse of the megalopolitan communities and the survival only of such groups as were able or could become able to revert to the practice of mutual aid, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. The only persons from whom this process was concealed were the inevitable progress party, who required yet another demonstration of the inevitability of post-revolutionary tyranny inherent in any revolution which retains the concept of centralised power. They have had that demonstration in France, in Russia, in Germany. Romanticism is fully vindicated as a theory of life, and its offspring anarchism as a theory of politics, by the only valid arbiter, the historical event.

Romanticism postulates the alliance of all human beings against the hostility of the universe, and against power, which is the attempt to push off the burden of personal responsibility on to other shoulders. Both biologically and historically, it is a wholly realistic view. It comprises no conclusion which is reached by any process save the examination of human experience and observation, and the anger of the classicists against it is based entirely upon the romantic rejection both of the wholly illusory ideas of historical and inevitable progress and of the implicit metaphysical assumption that human ideals have some unexplained entity, in a psychological vacuum called 'ultimate reality' — the ideals to which the most hardened dialectical materialist unconsciously appeal when he talks about 'social justice'.

Even more urgently romanticism rejects the form of social order in which human responsibilities are curtailed, to a point at which none of the conceptions which constitute justice or freedom retain any meaning save that which the stateholders confer on them, the condition of society in which we now live, and which is correctly termed barbarism. With the moral extinction of Christianity, romanticism remains the only ideology which has a coherent system of moral judgments on which it can rely, and because its morals and its sociology, its conception of human need and of human duty, coincide and have a common historic and scientific origin, it can confidently predict the self-destruction of every barbarian order.

The failure of nerve which the writers of *Partisan Review* deplore on ideological grounds is no more a failure of nerve on the part of the artist than a bad prognosis is a failure of nerve on the part of the doctor. Western civilisation is not moribund as a result of the failure of its social organisation; it is far more probably moribund through the failure of the individual to assert his resistance to organisation of an irresponsible

kind, and through a sort of natural decay which seems to afflict civilisations much as mortality afflicts individuals. I find it difficult to decide what it is that makes a 'civilisation', but one anthropological essential is a group ethic in which the individual retains his responsibility. Renan, a cynic would say, may well have been right in doubting whether, in the absence of some form of theocratic supernaturalism, however untrue, civilisations can remain coherent at all. Marxist historians point to the decay of the medieval theology and its successor, Victorian evangelicalism, as *symptoms* of the dialectical decay of medieval feudalism and Victorian capitalism — it is probably more true to say that the collapse of economic organisation and the collapse of bodies of belief and thought were parallel phenomena, determined by some third factor, the semi-organic process, through its rise and decay, of a complete civilisation.

Because romanticism has always been aware of the tragic aspects of human life, it has always tended to preach personalism, to base its ideology on direct responsibility and upon political anarchism. The romantic awareness of Death and the romantic awareness of personal human responsibility are indissolubly united. The political component results from the metaphysical. Because we are all in the same boat, therefore we are inevitably responsible to one another, as if we were afloat on the same raft. In those same periods of social expansion when the 'progressive' aspects of society are uppermost, it is hard enough for the artist to recognise that he is ultimately the enemy of society, but in a disintegrative phase such as the present the necessity for accepting the role of masterless men, in the face of 'total war' and total society, has been sprung on writers totally unprepared to grapple with it. The technical complexity of contemporary barbarism has produced a genuine loss of nerve among ex-classicists who have become dependent on it, and argue that while totalitarianism is manifestly loathsome, society is the giver of town-drainage and safe appendectomy as well as of mass raids on Hamburg and massacres in Poland. The romantic view is now what it has always been — that in dealing with acephalous societies one is perpetually at sea with Captain Bligh — when he orders the taking in of sail, he is obeyed with perfect discipline; when he orders us to flog a man, not a soul stirs. That is the lesson of responsibility which the peasant and the experienced human being know. The industrial abolition of humanity only obscured a conception which would have a universal assent in any responsible community. It is the rediscovery of the beastliness of which obedient citizens, educated in the Western virtues of

citizenship, are capable, which has so utterly overturned this generation. The Victorians had forgotten Death — it was swallowed up in Victory — and their excesses were removed to parts of the globe where they were inconspicuous to the artist. The lunacy of obedience played itself out on distant frontiers under the anaesthetic of an evangelical Christianity.

It was upon our generation that the decision was forced. Either we had to evade it by pleading some sort of artistic immunity (and thereby cease to be human beings), with the likelihood that even such a plea would not go down with the total society (I can see somebody getting his ticket from the German Army because he was an artist), or by cynical co-operation of the Ehrenburg-McLeish-Suarez brand, which might at least save our skins; or, we must face the choice between becoming good citizens and accepting our role as human beings and masterless men.

I say that to the Chinese or to the peasants of Europe or of ireland, more adult in humanity than most American or English artists, these things would have been obvious, and no such choice would have presented itself. But when the acceptance of the romantic attitude is characterised as a failure of nerve, it means that to apologise for it I must return to first principles. The romantic ideology of responsible disobedience is as much the logical produce of this age as responsible Christianity was the product of praetorian Imperial Rome. We are romantics because we have grown up romantics, and because we are human beings. In romanticism, art and science join hands, because both take the side of man against the compulsions of his environment, against Death, against power.

IV

I have described romanticism sympathetically, but not because I fail to see its fallacies. The classicist is running the perpetual risk of forfeiting his responsibility — the romantic of forfeiting his sanity. He is performing a continual tightrope walk over a series of intellectual abysses, of self-pity, self-dramatisation, mysticism, conversion to Roman Catholicism, acquiescence in political reaction, or pathological despair. The danger of such a collapse is greatest when the romantic ideology is thrown up half-consciously by a semi-emotional sense of impending social disaster, just as revolutionary classicism is at its most irresponsible when it comes into violent conflict with historical and sociological fact. But we are no more entitled to denounce romanticism in terms of romantics who have

lost their nerve than we are entitled to abolish coal gas because some persons use it as a means of suicide. Every idea and every ideology carries in itself the potential destruction of its adherents. The prediction that a social order is bound to destroy itself, while it is an unnerving conclusion, is no more a loss of nerve in itself than the conclusion upon scientific observation or common experience that a man is likely to die or a volcano to erupt. It is in the consciousness of common humanity and the retention of this wholly scientific conception of history that the validity of romanticism persists.

Because of these two provisos, romanticism today is not a destructive or a defeatist force. Its adherents in the sociological field predict the destruction of megalopolitan societies as a historical probability, and for that reason they tend to concentrate their practical activity in the cultivation of mutual aid, direct action, and the other communal activities which are the basis of culture, and in terms of which human life will survive. Such activity is essential, whether the destruction of barbarism occurs violently in mass air raids or by consent — those who predict violent disintegration on historical grounds have to remember that there is no such thing as inevitability in any historical process: they are dealing with probabilities, nothing more. Other factors than war or civil violence may operate to terminate the barbarian phase, and the resuscitation of mutual aid, personal responsibility and direct action, the three criteria of a civilised community, may occur by some form of political consent. There are also a good many historical examples of barbarian states surviving in an extended form, in which culture passes into a state of suspended animation: Rome underwent such a period between AD 70 and the final and gradual disintegration of Imperial barbarism: this alternative, the prolongation of servile barbarism by consent in the Western and American states, is a more menacing one for human culture than the prospect of the breakdown of megalopolitanisms by direct violence. It can be combated only by the encouragement of autonomous civilised activities from within — activities which deny the validity of the barbarian political system.

A few years ago, my immediate predecessors were chiefly influenced by the concept of the class war. I believe that the concept, as a force for progress, has outlived its truth (not because it was, in the first place, false — nobody in his senses could deny that it was and is an historical event) and become a partial truth only. We are beginning to see that 'classless' societies can be as preposterous in their demands on the individual conscience as any others, and as heavily impregnated with

barbarism. Where they have succeeded, it is because they have permitted the fragmentation of the state into individuals, civilised by mutual aid. Where they have not permitted it, they have become more tyrannical than the manifestly unjust societies that went before. The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society. The beginnings of every revolutionary movement show stages — the first, when it moves forward to overthrow a society whose demands on the individual are insane, being itself a free association of individuals; the second, when it stands still, and a Leviathan acquires a body; the third, when Leviathan becomes Frankenstein and the fitting object for a fresh revolution. Revolution is not a single act, it is an unending process based upon civil disobedience. The demands become increasingly exorbitant, abstract notions of solidarity are made concrete, a state is invested with powers and properties, centralisation inflates the vices of individual leaders to titanic proportions, and once again it preys on its individual members, with or without their consent. It is with this whole idea of society as a super-person that responsibility is at war, and class struggles are superseded by this struggle.

Certainly, this struggle, the relevant struggle, is overlapped by others — the class war, the European war. Many participants in fact remain participants through confusion of the two struggles. A good many of the dynamitards and secret journalists of Europe will resume their weapons against whatever carpet-bag state the Allies install. A good many communists — like the Old Guard — will be forced to continue their war against the classless state if they get it. The most discouraging thing is to see sincere people who appreciate the nature of society mistaking one struggle for the other. The war for freedom is the war against society. There is no other enemy.

And for those who can see the present war as a struggle for human freedom, I can only say that that is what they are fighting for but not what they will get. In a rigged society the scenery can be so skilfully changed. The obviously right course of action can be doggedly pursued until with the collapse of the stage scenery its true enormity appears. The people are the only victims and the only losers. Whoever wins it will not be they, and whatever results it will not be freedom. We are sitting now and awaiting the swindle.

What are we to teach the people? As writers and artists we cannot avoid teaching them. In all wars we are neutral, not because we ignore wrongdoing, but because as individuals we must apply identical standards to the actions of both sides. Acquiescence in the murder of the

population of Lidice is as evil as acquiescence in the murder of the population of Hamburg. We cannot be bothered with the interminable nonsense of causes and nations, because we know it to be fraudulent. It is a waste of breath to argue the intentions of the Allies or the Germans, the superiority of one set of professions over another, because both are fictitious — the electric hares that neither we, nor any other people that follow them, will ever be permitted to catch. Military action is a part of barbarism, and as such it cannot salvage civilisation. The 'obviously right' cause is so only because of the stage scenery which has been set up by society. Only people matter to us. When Diamond was fighting Capone, he missed a golden chance. He should have raised a citizen army to support him, on the ground that he only robbed while Capone cut throats: he should have denounced non-participants for acquiescing in murder. Our pity extents to every individual who is the victim of history — the persecuted Jews, the persecuted Indians. Stripes are red whatever back they are upon. We are neutral not because we feel too little of evil, but because we feel too much. At every move we make to assist a sufferer, crash goes our foot in an equally innocent face. To say 'all peoples are our friends, all societies are our enemies' is not as foolish as it sounds. We will say it.

As we look at Europe today, we cannot see it as writers of the thirties saw it. We do not see it as a clear-cut issue between progress and reaction. We see defrauded and deluded peoples engaged in utterly purposeless destruction, because the objects for which they fight are unreal hopes dangled in front of their noses by the respective governments of their countries. Because these peoples have abrogated their right to employ their intelligence and have agreed to act as Good Citizens, their sincerity and self-sacrifice count for absolutely nothing. (There is an equal sincerity and an equal self-sacrifice on both sides, exploited for diametrically opposite but equally fraudulent objects.)

The barbarian citizen, fascist or democratic, has delegated his culture to professional artists, his coition to professional film stars, his juridical duties to professional policemen, his civic rights to professional politicians. He remains alone with idleness, and the last human attribute, Death. For him all wars are irrelevant unless they destroy the mechanism of delegation and leave him a human being again, faced with the necessity for mutual aid.

I have referred to stage scenery. The young man of my own generation was pushed by society on to a stage where certain events were being enacted, shown the villain, and instructed to choose between shooting

him and being shot. Now in the circumstances of the play, and assuming all the conventions of melodrama, there was only one right course of action, but no sooner has one pursued it, for a year or a scene, than down comes the scenery and a fresh set-up, a fresh set of conventions appears, and one is told, 'now do your obvious duty' (which has become the direct opposite of what it was in Scene I, because the villain has been altered and several of the heroes have gone to the bad). And some of us have made up our minds that we will no longer be party to a bloodstained and fraudulent charade in which the weapons are loaded and the helpless audience are the only victims. We reject the dramatic conventions. From now on we will be concerned with people, not conjuring tricks.

But what are we to make of our subject? Europe stinks of blood and groans with separation. What are we to make of a world where disablement and sickness are priceless possessions, as sort of passport to life? How many wives would buy a game leg or a hunchback for their husbands — how many mothers for their sons? I was present at a strange celebration. We sat round a table drinking to a young man's future. A week before the house had been in mourning as if he were already dead. He was reaching his eighteenth birthday, when one chooses between a butcher's life and a sheep's death. The papers had come. During the day he fell into his machine at work. One of his legs became shorter than the other. It was as though he had been given a paper certifying: 'This man is out of the hands of the Lunatics. If he looks sharp and is lucky, he may form a cell for himself into which the gangs of Good Citizens, who patrol the world looking for people to educate by cutting their windpipes, may fail to break'.

That, until the fall of barbarism at its own hands, is how Freedom comes.

V

I say all this, because I believe that in essence art is the act of standing aside from society, with certain important qualifications. (I ask my critics to abstain from quoting this until they have heard the rest of the story.) Herbert Read has pointed out that in truly free communities art is a general activity, far more cognate with craft than it can ever be in contemporary organised life, and he consigns the professional artist to his father the devil. I accept the proposition: it seems to be merely another statement of the hostility between barbarism and humanity which I have described. A state of affairs in which art could become a part of all daily

activity, and in which all activity was potentially creative, would be a free community, and not a society — that is, a personified body treated as though it were an entity in itself — of the kind I have attacked. Art, when it is professionalised, consists in standing aside.

But it is essential that there should be no bitterness in the action. It may take any form, from the pure escape of decoration to the analysis of dreams and impulses in the myth, and to the most savage denunciation. But there must be no bitterness against humanity, or the artist defeats his own end. Neither must there be an attitude of superiority. He has absolutely no right to claim exemptions or privileges except in his capacity as a human being. The artist employs his form as the voice of a great multitude. It is only through the vicarious activity of creation that the great multitude ever finds a voice. Every creative activity speaks on behalf of utterly voiceless victims of society and circumstance, of everyone, finally, since man is always at some time the victim of his environment: and since they have undergone the supreme indignity, on behalf of the dead. The artist in barbarian society is the only true representative of the people.

That is what I mean by saying that the essence of romanticism is the acceptance of a sense of tragedy. All creative work speaks on behalf of somebody who would otherwise be voiceless, even the decoration of the potter who protests against the monotony of his work. I am always conscious of these submerged voices, as much in the tentative and nervous forms of early expression — savage and childhood productions, bad derivative art produced, under civilised conditions, by people striving to express themselves — as in the technically professional work of the great ages of painting. No creative activity is free from the sense of protest. It is the sole way open to man of protesting against his destiny.

In the actual circumstances of contemporary writing, the standing aside must take different forms, though if it involves bitterness, hatred, a sense of moral and aesthetic superiority, or any form of ivory-towerism, it defeats itself. On the one hand, one can and must stand aside, though one can at the same time admire the scale and tragic quality of an event, or the courage which has gone to make an achievement. Anyone who is not deeply moved by events is probably not capable of creation. There is not the smallest reason why a poet should not write odes to the Russian Revolution or the Dneiper Dam if these subjects move him, and represent the message which, on behalf of some of the submerged voices, he is attempting to interpret, any more than there is a reason why he should not hate a tyrant or drive a concrete-mixer. But the poetry is subsequent

to the fact that whoever writes it has already stood far enough away from his subject to be able to see it in reasonable and historical proportion. It is the right to do this, even in a community whose ideals inspire sympathy, that is utterly fundamental to good writing, and it is precisely this right which contemporary society is unanimous in denying. When it comes to the interpretation of the war, both publics and their leaders realise, consciously or unconsciously, that there is no more serious threat to the will to continue fighting than the existence of a body of objective art. It requires to be explained away, blackguarded into silence, conscripted, or ignored, according to the methods in vogue in the society concerned. But it continues to exist. The right to stand aside is contested everywhere. Leaders who have acclaimed the work of a particular artist because he denounced their opponents are exasperated to find that the denunciatory criticism extends to themselves.

And on the other hand there is the essential prerequisite on which all romantic theory is founded — the community of the artist with his fellow men: in other words, his humanity. He must cater for the need to stand aside by regarding all movements and societies neutrally, not in that he refuses to judge them *at all*, but that he judges them on the same basis. He cannot afford to have in his bag divers weights — that is one of the traits of civic lunacy. The artist's isolation and humanity are no different from the isolation and humanity of other responsible people — isolation from barbarism, solidarity with other human beings. It is a tribute to English letters that in a period of almost unparalleled national insanity England should have produced Trevelyan's *Social History*. This is the history of the relationships and the experience from which there is no standing aside, the story of humanity in its incessant war with society. If the artist is to take the side of man, he is fulfilling both his duties of isolation and humanity.

I disagree with the idea that the artist is primarily the interpreter of the symptoms and processes of economic change — to follow Caudwell's conception is to limit the number of levels on which art could or should exist. The unit with which the artist is concerned is first of all the individual human being. The romantic artist sees him exactly as the physician sees him — an individual who shares his organs and a high proportion of his psychological make-up with every individual who has existed within historical time, and with the artist himself. Like the physician, the artist is one of humanity, subject to every branch of human experience, from politics to death, but possessing by virtue of his talent the faculty which the physician acquires through training, of elucidating,

interpreting, assisting. His sensibility corresponds to the physician's medical training — consciously or unconsciously he is aware of the individual's position and of the roots in anthropology, psychology and evolution which make up humanness. He is neither a superman nor a privileged person, any more than the physician is. It is with this quality of humanness that the romantic is primarily concerned — it is the origin of the romantic sympathy, the concept of shared, responsible experience, and of man as the product and victim of environment, which makes romanticism and defines it. In addition to this prerequisite consciousness, there is the technical mastery, learned or acquired, which is needed to express it. One might almost continue the analogy and say that classicism bears some resemblance to operative surgery — there is the same emphasis on technical virtuosity and the same preoccupation with intervention rather than with organic process. To the artist as a human being, and to the physician in his practice, the sense of continuity of circumstances and difference of environment are perpetually present — the human being and the patient, for the purposes of art and medicine, are fundamental constants. There is no difference between Hagesichora and any other young girl dancing, between the Homeric warriors and any other soldier — you cannot tell whether the man under the theatre towels is a Nazi or an anarchist; that aspect of his existence concerns you very little — you are interested in him as a man. The neutrality of medicine has survived this war well. The neutrality of romantic art will also survive it, because it is based on the far larger community of man, which society tends to destroy, which one finds only in London's slums or America's prisons. It seems to me that it is this university in art which Marxist classicism misses, just as in the political sphere it does not extend 'working class solidarity' into the responsible and anti-authoritarian conception of human solidarity. It is the extension of this evaluation of man into politics which makes up anarchism, and the common foundation of anarchism and romanticism renders them inseparable in the evolution of art, just as medicine as a practice, if we are to oppose it to the technical vetinary surgery of such people as army psychologists, whose aim is something other than plain human welfare, is inseparable from a similar human neutrality.

The value of Marxist criticism has lain, however, in its perpetual emphasis on the environmental concern of the artist. Once fortified with this conception of humanity and his knowledge that he is a part of it, not an observer, the artist is under obligation to concern himself with the entire environment of the times, both by interpreting it and by modifying

it. Writers who are afraid to throw their weight into the cause of the humanity they recognise will find little in the tradition of romanticism to support their abstention. This criticism is valuable in itself, but at present is pretty consistently directed against the wrong people. It is the concept of irresponsible society, whatever its social organisation, that is now and always has been the enemy of the romantic conception of man, and in a period of disintegration, with irresponsibility at a premium, the artist who reflects and interprets is accused of decadence, and the artist who advocates responsibility is accused of disruption. I cannot see an iota of difference between the attacks of sycophants and clowns who propagate a theory of cultural bolshevism (that Joyce and Proust were responsible for the fall of France, for instance) and those of the political actives who charge romantic individualism with losing its nerve. They are both imitating the man who smashes the barometer because it points to rain.

VI

This characteristic phase of a collapsing culture is very obvious in England and America at present. It merits further discussion. The stupid and illiterate attacks of Alfred Noyes on Proust, the venom with which bourgeois formalism has been denounced by the communists, and the suppression of the work of Klee by the Nazis, had this in common — they were all attacks upon images of disintegration by people who feared the disintegration itself and could not see its cause. Some of them were the product of mere personal or political malice. Yet there remains a valid ground for attack, upon purely disintegrative and analytic forms such as surrealism — they are not fully human. The real treason lies not in reflecting disintegration but in failing to reflect anything else.

There is still confusion of mind among the enemies of disintegration who have rather more grasp on its causes than the dealers in cultural bolshevism. Perhaps the most striking instance of this confusion is to be found in their attempts to defend art. I have in mind the pamphlets and counter-pamphlets of 1943-44: it is the nearness of the disintegration which upsets them, precisely as it has upset and unnerved the poets.

The right-wing critic can see that the pretensions of artists of the disintegrative school to be immune from the collapse by virtue of their function as artists are preposterous: he can see that the common individual, who retains his humanity in the face of everything, is sound, but he rushes to identify the Cause of Man with the Cause of Humanity

sponsored by the *Daily Telegraph*. The aristocrat can see that the war is a fraud, but pins the blame on the anti-cultural bias of the masses. This controversy is conducted in the same historical Wonderland as that of A.L. Rowse, who prophesies a 'new Elizabethan age' — a remark historically equivalent to predicting a new Secession of the Plebs in the reign of Nero, or a new set of milk-teeth in a centenarian.

Yet there is a real failure of nerve in the manuscripts which 1944 brought in to every English poetry magazine, in which the sole images present are images of disintegration — one reads of nothing else: it is the schizophrenia of writers who are unable to cut themselves off from the collapse of society, because to do so would involve them in an adult awareness of humanity, including an awareness of death. *Partisan Review* and *Horizon* are full of the praises of schizophrenia. The failure of nerve is common to the people who attack it, if one excludes the sycophants and the congenital idiots, and a great many of the people they are attacking. The romantic wholeness involves a good deal more than the passive acceptance of collapse — there is also the assertion of responsibility to one's fellows, and the exhortation to disobey the irresponsible directives of barbarism. I think that the best example of this wholeness in the face of barbarism is Brueghel. The disquietening images of disintegration are there — Mumford selects him as the symbolic exponent of the medieval collapse — but one feels that the artist has no share in them. It is not he who is disintegrating but the society whose irresponsibility he hates — the society of expressionless unanimous skeletons, the forest of lances that supports Herod. The humanity of Herod's soldiers is stressed as much as their unanimity. These are the lunatics, but at home they are also peasants. The victims and killers are interchangeable. The subject of each of these masterpieces is an aspect of the romantic struggle of Man against his environmental enemies, the fully human Man who is shown us with his physical and mental equipment of faults and virtues in the 'peasant' pictures. *The Triumph of Death*, the *Massacre of the Innocents*, Man against Obedience, Man against Death. If we cannot win the second battle we can at least win the first.

Accordingly, we apply the same standards to every cause or body which presents itself, without owing allegiance to any of them. We recognise boundless responsibility to men, especially to all those who are deprived of their voices, but ultimately to all men, since they will in time become silent. We must demand the right to secession as the one square foot of ground which is solid and from which we can look and interpret the gigantic chaos of human existence. We are learning

ourselves to live in the structure of insane societies while defying them, practising to retain our lives as if we were really sane men in an asylum where all individuals were allies and all bodies were bent on killing us, and we teach others, as far as we can, to do likewise.

The weak are inheriting the earth, though we are forced to fight, plot, deceive for every inch of the legacy. They are taxed, killed, frightened, conscripted, swindled, interned, collectively; the gangs of good citizens drive them like sheep, they are dragged from their standing ground by the innumerable pressure of the flood around them, and the ranks of Bedlamite citizenship are recruited from them. They inherit by default, like small animals inhabiting the floor of a forest, and dying off like flies, but they strike back ineffectually and, by sheer weight of numbers, invincibly. Their aggregate intervals of sanity suffice to overthrow the entire edifice of society which has been built on their backs and out of their flesh. Their sane moments are ultimately decisive. Their clinging among the wreckage to mutual aid perpetuates civilisation. In the ultimate explosion of the barbarism structure, islets of true civilisation, the nuclei of future cultures which have still their upward cycle to run, persist and grow. Then in a decade or two they begin like coral insects to construct a new load for their backs. But all of them are ready now and again, in the time of barbarism, to assert their personality from time to time. The woman who fails to fuse a shell securely, the clerk who does not look a second time at a pass, the girl who hides a deserter and the idiot who misdirects an escort, whatever their nationality, are acting as members and soldiers of the community of the weak, the greatest conspiracy in history, which is ceaseless. It is quite irrelevant that at the next moment they are killing Jews, bombing cities, supporting Jacks-in-office and believing lies. At times every one of them has struck a minor blow for personality. It is to these people that art owes a responsibility which is hard to measure. Among modern writers one feels that only Arnold Zweig and Giono have achieved it continuously, and some reports suggest that the German occupation has disorientated even Giono.

It is rare that a free community of such people can come into existence. One finds islands of community which have escaped the curse of personified societies scattered everywhere — the shelters during the air raids, the Cossack villages, some primitive tribes, prisoners in Dachau or Huyton, the Russian collective farms. These are the largest communities in which anarchism is real and the standing aside preliminary to creation is not resented to the same degree as in the societies of clock-faces, whose sole virtue is their unanimity in error. This virtue is a virtue

of death. They do not escape death by evading it in the renunciation of life. It is not for nothing that Brueghel's skeletons have all the same faces.

And artistic responsibility consists in taking all this upon our shoulders — in providing voices for all those who have not voices. The romantic ideology of art is the ideology of that responsibility, a responsibility borne out of a sense of victimhood, of community in a hostile universe, and destined like Prometheus, its central creation, to be the perpetual advocate and defender of Man against Barbarism, community against irresponsibility, life against homicidal and suicidal obedience.

***Art and Social Responsibility: Lectures on the Ideology of Romanticism,* Falcon Press, 1946**

Notes

1. 1942.

2. I am surprised that Fromm (*The Fear of Freedom*) and other psychologists do not make more of this. The fear of death is probably at root the fear of isolation, rather than of a cessation of experience. Total isolation is reached only in 'deteriorated' schizophrenia and in death, but one of the chief artistic grounds for attacking contemporary societies is that they produce a false sense of community while, in reality, they destroy the individual's true relation with his fellows and substitute a relationship to a fictitious dummy, the Group.

3. Singularly enough, some critics again attempt to depict this view as a form of religious mysticism, largely because it uses the term 'human nature' and discusses the relationship of man to the Universe. Except in so far as philosophical pessimism is a 'religion', it is difficult to see in what way a romantic interpretation of history is any more 'religious' than a marxist of physiochemical interpretation. It certainly rejects every form of supernaturalism. As to Whitehead's conception of romanticism as a revolt against science, the romantic conception of metaphysics and politics is constituted in the same way as any scientific hypothesis — by reference to the observed facts of history or of psychology. Its interpretation may be fallible, but its method is surely above reproach, even from the rationalists, whose notion of the economic reform of society has no historical evidence to support it. I would have placed the romantic awareness high in the list of causes of scientific progress.

4. In view of criticisms which have been made of this remark, it needs qualifying. I do not say that all groups are bad, any more than I say that because all men have stomachs they are dyspeptics. The tendency to degenerate into irresponsibility is inherent in every group, once its members cease to act as individuals, and transfer their responsibility from their fellow men to the group. Where I use the word 'society' in a derogatory sense, I mean a society in which this change for the worse has taken place.

5. Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, IV, 9, page 256.

SEVEN

Peace and Disobedience

No laws are binding on the individual subject that assault the person or violate the conscience. — BLACKSTONE

Political prophets must be judged by the accuracy of their predictions. There is no other standard that we can fairly apply to estimate the value of their hypotheses. For some years both we and our opponents have been offering predictions on the future of Europe — predictions based on interpretations of history, by the substantial accuracy of which those interpretations must be judged. And the only certainty which remains after the Second World War is that it has confounded every one of its political advocates and signally vindicated the predictions of its political opponents.

During the middle stages of the war, it was fashionable for those who were finding out the extent of fascist barbarity for the first time to reiterate that now, at any rate, pacifism and personal opposition to war and tyranny by disobedience were outmoded. They no longer possessed any political relevance. The two articles of faith upon which the anti-fascist war was fought, by English intellectuals at least, were these: that there is no other way than the war of armies and national governments by which contemporary tyranny can be opposed, and that this war was unique, a phenomenon unlike any other war in history. At the present time, when history has reduced both those statements to absurdity, we are in a position to formulate, or rather to repeat, our own articles of faith. Pacifism is a historical attitude, and it can only be judged historically. Either it is true by the standard of history or it is not — there is no mystique about it: if it is to live, it will do so because it is historically and sociologically in accordance with fact, not because it is beautiful or on the side of God or the angels. Either it is a practical policy to attack tyranny by means of individual disobedience and resistance, or it is not. The tenets which, to my mind, make up the political expression of pacifism are these: that every appeal to organised force, by its inevitable degeneration into irresponsibility, is a counter-revolutionary process, and tends to produce tyranny; that the only effective answer to total

regimentation is total disobedience; and that there is nothing which is more disastrous than contemporary war — nothing which can make war a 'lesser evil'. These propositions were true in 1939, and nothing which has occurred at Belsen or anywhere else has in any way affected their truth. I do not believe that it is evil to fight — the nature of all contemporary states is such that to relapse, as some pacifists have done, into a licensed objection instead of total resistance is morally comparable with membership of the Gestapo as a potato-peeler, on condition that one is not asked to murder anybody. We have to fight obedience in this generation as the French maquisards fought it, with the reservation that terrorism, while it is understandable, is not an effective instrument of combating tyranny. For me, pacifism rests solely upon the historical theory of anarchism, and it is because the PPU takes its stand upon a pledge of disobedience that I believe it to be a relevant organisation.

Those who took their stand against the war because they believed in human liberty and responsibility and recognised the utter irrelevance of military victory in a conflict of such a character, were opposed with the argument that the road not only to personal survival but to international amity and national self-realisation lay through this conflict, that individual disobedience was impotent against organised repression — that even if we were walking on corpses, at least we were walking towards the comity of nations.

Every one of those predictions has proved false. We are confronted with a certainty of renewed war even more imminent than it was in 1935, with a world equally divided between rapacious and mendacious gangs, with the knowledge that the technique and conception of the repressive state must be fought all over again at the level of personal resistance where it is vulnerable, by those individual and personal methods of disobedience which are the only weapons effective against it, the only revolutionary ideology which does not carry in itself the seeds of a post-revolutionary tyranny. The democratic allies have disgraced themselves more completely in the sight of historical libertarianism than any coalition which ever uttered a pretension or broke a promise. They have reduced indiscriminate bombardment to a fine art. They have replaced famine, destruction and repression with repression, destruction and famine. They have repeated in detail actions which differ only from those of the fascists in that we are responsible for them. They have debased the currency of humanity to an even lower level than have the fascists themselves, because they have debased it in the name of human liberation. Fascism was the conscious and voluntary adoption of that irrationalism which

lies at the root of all irresponsible societies, and the practice of that irrationalism is no less inevitable because we choose to repudiate it. The savagery of the Japanese towards their prisoners was in itself a less serious social phenomenon than the savagery of the Allies towards the population of Japan, for if the first was the product of the zoo, the second, like Belsen and Maidenek, was the product of the lunatic asylum.

Against this irrationalism the peoples have revolted too late. The signal ejection of the Tories in this country, even if it offered the prospect of a removal of centralised power, which it does not, cannot arrest the trend of events of which Toryism was less a cause than a symptom. If there is one prediction in which the political opponents of the war were mistaken, it was in overestimating the degree to which the English public has come to acquiesce in the savagery done in their name. The final atomic massacre, following upon hundreds of similar acts on a smaller scale, could still stir some public indignation. But there is a wide difference between indignation and resistance. The conclusion of the anarchist theory of history and barbarism must be resisted by individual disobedience, and that all other forms of resistance to it are self-defeating, has been vindicated in every occupied country, but in this country we are no nearer to the practice of that realisation.

It has been ably argued by Orwell and others that the military techniques and weapons of a period tend to dictate its social structure — the longbow and the hand grenade make for libertarianism; the atom bomb and the aeroplane, weapons which cannot be manufactured by a body smaller than a state, for a tyrannical order, because of the relative concentration of the power of making and using them in the hands of the rulers. It has been argued that against tyranny equipped with nuclear energy no resistance is possible. Orwell foresees a stable order of tyranny based on these weapons. But it is an essential feature of the new ways of war that they are indiscriminate, and can be used only against a community — they are weapons with few ideological possibilities. Armed revolution cannot succeed, but armed revolution, being based upon power, has never succeeded in producing anything but tyranny. The very states which are able to make and use atomic weapons are singularly vulnerable, by their very complexity, to the attacks of individual disobedience, and the events of the war have proved abundantly that the weapons at the disposal of tyranny against individual recalcitrants are precisely what they were in 2000 BC — terrorism, mass execution, political police, propaganda. The contentions of anarchism have been strengthened, not weakened, by the advent of new weapons.

It seems that the forcible destruction of centralised power, the chief preoccupation of other generations of libertarian thought, is becoming less and less our responsibility. Those institutions now constitute a far more serious threat to themselves than any revolutionary movement. The history of libertarianism is the history of alternation between the fear of stable tyranny which must be subverted and the conviction that tyrannies contain the matter of their own violent end. It is perfectly true that no society since the fall of Rome has contained so much historically explosive material. Megalopolitan government is utterly irresponsible, it displays an irrevocable tendency to war, and its cities are increasingly indefensible. Its irresponsibility runs parallel with its lack of cohesion, its militarism with its vulnerability. In such an order war ceases to be a means of upholding the status quo — the new feature of war in the last fifty years is that it tends to subvert all existing social organisations, to sweep away its makers rather than to maintain their power. The overwhelming historical probability is that the face of Europe in twenty years will closely resemble the face of Germany today, save that there will be no army of occupation: a society divided between semi-isolated groups living in the ruins of megalopolitan civilisation, reverting to natural patterns of mutual aid as a means of survival, and preyed upon by surviving bands who still maintain a vestige of military organisation — primitive human groups, preyed on by power-groups, the pattern which remained after the Thirty Years' War.

This is the historical probability. But we must not fall into the Marxist fallacy of regarding probable historical processes as if they were inevitable — prediction based on history is as reliable as medical prognosis: it is the estimation of the probable result of a complex environment on a complex organism. The pattern of Europe in which the defeat of barbarism has taken place may be as I have described it, but there are two other possibilities. There is the possibility that in the collapse one or more of the barbarian states may escape with its power structure almost intact, and impose an authoritarian pattern upon the survivors, as it is being imposed upon Germany today. The danger of stable tyranny is real, especially since the tendency of citizen and military groups, as in Germany will be to attempt to revert to the familiar pattern of irresponsibility. And there remains a third possibility. English history has shown a consistent tendency, which cannot be ignored, to disappoint the apocalyptic prophecies which political theorists make. It is conceivable that in any conflict, factors arising to postpone the collapse of barbarism may give time for libertarian and anarchist ideas to assert

themselves in a field which they expressly repudiate — the field of political power. Anarchists stand apart from parliamentary activity because they cannot logically take part in a process which depends upon power and which they variously regard as self-vitiated or fraudulent or both. But they cannot prevent the misunderstanding and partial adoption of their ideology by those who do not wholly reject power or the extension of some part of their conception of freedom into the field of social democracy. However improbable, therefore, a compromise between power and decentralisation may appear, it is not historically impossible, least of all in England, and for a while at least stable liberalism is a possibility.

These three possible events, the apocalyptic, the tyrannical or the liberal, make little difference to our immediate task. We have three duties: to resist, to educate and to establish and encourage mutual aid communities. By these means we may make possible survival if western society collapses, the ability to resist if tyranny succeeds it, and the readiness of the people if reform can be gained by compromise. Resistance and disobedience are still the only forces able to cope with barbarism, and so long as we do not practice them we are unarmed.

Against this background, we are faced with the prospect of conscription. That means that our own war has not yet begun. We have seen it begun, tentatively and haltingly but bravely, by the resistance movements of all countries. We have one enemy, irresponsible government, against which we are committed to a perpetual and unrelenting maquis. Every government that intends war is as much our enemy as ever the Germans were. To accept a conscription based on the unlimited coercive brutalities of the glasshouse because it included an exemption clause would be contemptible lunacy. Wars are not deplorable accidents produced by the perfidy of degenerate nations — they are the results of calculated policy: we will set them outside the bounds of calculation. Atrocities are not only the work of sadists — your friends and relatives who butchered the whole of Hamburg were not sadists — they are the result of obedience, an obedience which forgets its humanity. We will not accept that obedience. The safeguard of peace is not a vast army, but an unreliable public, a public that will fill the streets and empty the factories at the word War, that will learn and accept the lesson of resistance. The way to stop atrocities is to refuse to participate in them.

The weapon of irresponsibility today, the weapon that has characterised the collapse of every megalopolitan military state, is military conscription, the final impudence of the demand that men should put

their bodies and consciences in hands that they may not question, and over which they have no control. The maquis fights for a cause which he can lose but cannot vitiate — it cannot be taken from him: the soldier fights for a cause which, because it lies outside his hands, is forfeit from the day that he obeys. We will be the maquisards of the peace; not by violence but by disobedience, not by terrorism but by humanity we will utterly destroy the conscription upon which the military plans of Great Powers are based. We will see that when next they attempt to make this structure bear their weight, it will precipitate the adventurers into the filth where they deserve to be.

The relevance of pacifism has never stood higher, if we wish it. Political leaders have never looked smaller or more despicable in the eyes of the world public than the brawlers and oil-hunters of the 'United Nations' sitting and manoeuvring for position among the ruins and starvation which they have created, a policyless caucus of tyrants who lack even the stature of tyranny. The atomic bomb has brought home to increasing numbers of the public at large that tyranny is not a greater evil than war, because war itself it an instrument of tyranny on the largest scale. The will to resist is there — it is essential that the conception of a pacifism of personal objection, directed to the salvaging of one's own conscience, should be replaced by a pacifism able to canalise and provide support for the ordinary man's resistance to the destruction of his own rights and life — the resistance which makes conscription necessary. We do not want to look too closely at the motives of those who wish to resist — they have an indefeasible right to do so, and it is our job to lead them. The attack on peacetime conscription, which is being waged in America, has to be conducted in this country, and I believe we can conduct it successfully.

It is possible that resistance to war will lead us to the necessity of resistance to a tyranny other than that of our own government, which will be costly and destructive. But we can accept it in the knowledge that the results of such a resistance are historically permanent, and that its cost in life and suffering would be infinitely less than that of a renewed national war.

Objection is not enough. The objector, particularly the religious objector, is politically irrelevant because he is chiefly interested in safeguarding his own conscientious objection to one aspect of state irresponsibility. You do not want objection, you want resistance, personal and national, organised and individual, ready to adopt every means short of violence to destroy and render useless the whole mechanism of

conscription. It is not enough to secure the immunity and the support of religious believers and a politically conscious minority. The opposition of the ordinary man to military service must be canalised. He will not stand up against the machinery of governments and penalties, with the knowledge that his wife and children are hostages, unless he has the consciousness of that powerful, if invisible, support which the European resistance movements gave to the unpolitical man in his opposition to the Germans. Men will defy conscription in defence of their own lives and homes against military adventurers *if they know that there is someone to support them*. They will act out of an intuitive and thoroughly unpatriotic love of freedom, the sentiment which makes conscription necessary in the first place. The answer to conscription, in England and in every country of the world, is a resistance movement which does not confine itself to anarchists or Quakers, and which asks few political credentials of its members. We have no right to ask whether a man is a draft-dodger of a high-minded idealist — he has the right to reject conscription, and we must uphold that right. The time for public protest is running out — it is no good protesting against men like Himmler, Harris or the American race fanatics: they must be resisted. It is by taking the offensive that pacifism will become politically relevant. It seems to me that we have been too long intoxicated by the semblance of a democracy which we knew to be unreal. It is weighted and we cannot win, but we continue to pay lip-service to it. The organisers of conscription are as much our enemies as a foreign invader, and deserve no better treatment. The political relevance of pacifism lies in its willingness to substitute resistance for objection, and it seems to me that the time for such substitution is riper from one day to the next.

Peace News Pamphlet, 1946

EIGHT

Preface to Kenneth Patchen

It is difficult to preface Patchen's selected work with any comment which can add to the reader's appreciation, because work of this kind, like all the poetry which takes its origin from Hart Crane and from the speech of contemporary America, has an impact which is wholly immediate — one cannot evaluate it and read it at the same time. Patchen, who is, to my mind, unquestionably the greatest of Crane's successors, and potentially a greater and more coherent figure than Crane himself, has brought the perfection of this immediacy to a point at which, when it succeeds, is very like a blow in its total effect, and it is equally impossible to analyse. His gift for the purely lyrical and evocative phrase is never submerged, even in the poems which succeed least in their intellectual content. But it is not only this gift which makes Patchen's significance. He owes his stature entirely to the fact that he is a human being, that he has a sense of pity, that he has never forfeited the fact of being a man; and because of his humanity and pity he can produce the utterly withering blast of scorn and contempt for the pimps, thimble-riggers, atomic liberators, and the rest of the Gadarene filth who are making the world a desert — a human being, at his full height, surrounded by the enormous chaos and putrefaction of barbarism, standing for pity and human achievement against the entire barbarian apparatus. He is one of those solitary figures like Henry Miller who is utterly unafraid, and whose writing is one vast gesture of solidarity with the victims who know they are victims and the victims who think they are winners. The existence of medical science and this kind of poetry are the only two factors which give contemporary Western life any claim to be called a civilisation.

The vastness of the conflict, and the depth of Patchen's feeling about it, make him incoherent. Some of the poems are little more than the ejaculations of somebody who is watching a crucifixion. As a satirist he has a fund of scorn and just anger which is out of fashion. It is the fury of someone who loves his fellow men. There is no misanthropy and no cheap sniggering about it. The Army of the Night has found a voice here, which says 'Down with them, let the maniacal cruelty which they spend their substance to devise destroy them, because it shall not destroy us'.

The imagery is a sadistic imagery, because in the world we live in they have covered everything, even the flowers, with blood. There has been a tendency to aloof inhumanity in much of our own war poetry, because we relied too much on understanding history. Patchen both understands and feels — he sees the ruin and murder which is coming, and feels the death of every victim.

If the spirit of Patchen comes to reach the new conscript generation, if his poetry and his attitude to poetry gives the next generation a voice, there will be a sound in the street that will not be rain.

Kenneth Patchen, *Outlaw of the Lowest Planet*,
Grey Walls Press, 1946

NINE

War, Peace and Literature

The most recent developments in the English literary climate — the slump in poetry, for example — are direct products of the withdrawal of the war. The impetus of the new poetic movements between 1938 and 1945, even when they were not explicitly contemporary in theme, was derived from the impetus of war, of fighting or refusing to fight, and of being confronted with events possessing speed and scale. But the stimulus of war continues after the end of hostilities only in defeated countries, not in those which win.

The present event may have deprived us of the literature even of the vanquished, since the fascist regimes inflicted wounds on literature which made it incapable of responding to anything, and I doubt if there will be any renaissance comparable to that of French poetry in 1940 until the Germans become more coherently resentful. Even then the protest might well take the form of a nationalism which has no place in valid poetic statement.

The literature of the winners is suffering from a rather different aftermath of war — the English when they win are generally in a

sufficiently critical frame of mind, in spite of what has gone before, to feel guilty about it. The American literary scene, which is as varied as ever, owes its variety largely to individuals like Patchen, Miller, Cummings and Aitken, for whom 'victory' in the conventional sense amounted to a personal defeat. Probably the only good work which is neither disgruntled nor guilt-ridden is that of the peasant populations who have just organised the proletarian revolution, and have not yet progressed far enough for it to become dominated by political orthodoxy — there are signs that communist Yugoslavia may produce some of its own Mayakovskys, and a genuine strain of popular writing which fuses primitivism and revolutionary sentiment.

The fringes of the Russian, like those of the French, Revolution may continue as active sources of literature long after the centre has undergone its counter-revolution. But of the conventional literary traditions, those of America and France remain the most productive, while in England there is evidence that we are entering another quiescent phase like that of 1920, which may last until it is broken by events.

At the end of the 1914 war the seeds of the new poetry in Hopkins, Eliot, the Sitwells, Owen and Yeats were present but probably not readily distinguishable; the seeds of the next movement today are no doubt there, but they will be pointed out in as many quarters as there are critics — the future growth of a continuity is no more fixed than the future of history, and to that extent all the critics may be right. It is not so profitable, perhaps, to point out probable tendencies in form, which depend largely on individual experiment, as to notice the general shape of the movement of thought among writers.

While in 1914 one could not have predicted Imagism, one might have predicted that the tendency of the literary impulse would have been anti-nationalist, anti-militarist, and socialist. Today we have seen a replacement of the socialism of the 1930s, both individually and in the mass, by a growing acceptance of art as a personal activity, a facet of rebellion, a rejection of classicism, and a fusion for the first time in European literature of romanticism and reason, where the emotional conclusions of a Godwin or a Shelley have the rational support of a Geddes, a Jung or a Mumford, and it is in this fusion of romantic with social-anarchist thought that I expect to see the inspiration of much which will be written. But without accepting that view as anything more than a personal one, the reader can sense a number of tendencies which might bring such a result to being. It is true to say that literature today in England, America and France, although France is divided, is more

distrustful of the organisation of societies and of the state than it has ever been.

Anti-stateism may have many roots, ranging from an attempt by the Right to discredit the Left to the desire of Mr Bevin to recruit propagandists opposed to communism, but discussion of the state at the level of the Conservative press, or at the level of the anti-fascist or anti-Russian broadcasts sponsored by states, has little to do with literature. The writer who speaks a truth of his own finding may be drawn into such a discussion, as Koestler was supported, against his own will, first by the Allies as a denouncer of fascism, and now by the proponents of the next crusade as an opponent of communism. But the fundamental influence of those who suspect the state in itself has extended rather as did the influence of writers who brought back from the 1914 war an equally profound anti-militarism.

It is in defeated Germany that the collapse of the state has been most profound, and it is there that such an influence as this may be decisive. The division of the world into ideological camps proceeds by stages — *pro-* and *anti-*fascist divide into *pro-* and *anti-*communist, with a continual throwing out of the viewpoint most closely attached to the centralisation of power.

It seems as if the collision between communism and plutocracy may be forestalled by a collision between the individual and the whole concept of the state, in which the opponents of communism who today advocate war against it would find alliance with their former enemy more tolerable than a wholesale rejection of power as the basis of society. Marxists and capitalists having banded together against fascism are re-divided into Marxists and *anti-*Marxists, and the conflicts have in each case produced a stimulation of literature, but it is literature which can influence the next conflict but one — that in which fascists, communists and capitalists find common ground in opposing the free individual.

Conflicts of this kind probably influence literature today more profoundly than any other factor except the form of urban societies, from which the conflicts themselves originate. The manner in which they are translated depends on a relatively small number of individuals who find themselves influenced. I feel that the most catastrophic and salutary change in the face of European literature since the French Revolution might come about if the practical experience of German writers, who have now 'had' fascism, communism, and military democracy, complete with indiscriminate bombing, can make contact with the theoretical conclusions of the American rebels.

Patchen and Miller write as if they were citizens of an occupied country. Their personal experience forestalls the group experience of populations who have lived under the conditions of modern defeat. It is possible that German writers may reject them as decadent, and attempt to revert to a 'strong' administration and a 'strong' attitude based on power. If they do so, their literature will be impoverished along with their politics. The future of English literature is not directly dependent on this decision, since it can tick over in a tradition of lyrical poetry which is a national possession, but its ultimate shape may well be determined, as it has been in the past, by influence from the Continent of Europe to which it belongs, and from which it has always drawn the content, though not the form, of its creative writing.

Location unknown, c.1946

TEN

Imagination or Reportage?

You asked me to write to you about *The Power House*, and tell you why and how it came to be written. I began it in 1941, at the London Hospital Annexe at Brentwood. I wrote it in its present form for a good many reasons, but chiefly because none of the people who ought to have written such a book were showing any sign of doing so. The realists at that time had lost touch with history and were busy Crusading for Freedom — the imaginative prose writers, all but Greene and Warner, were showing signs of retiring into schizophrenia. I could see no subject then save history which was possible for the novelist, and no vehicle for it save imaginative realism — there was plenty of writing about the events of the war, but for me the criterion of historical realism is that the writer should remain capable of applying a coherent set of standards to the conduct of both sides — Koestler was about the only person who was doing so. Since 1941 England and America have produced a great deal

of good literature, but apart from poetry I believe the only lasting works have been social or historical — Mumford's *Culture of Cities* and Miller's *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, for instance.

A writer has not only to select his technique, he has also to select his masters. If I imitated Zola, I did so because I was drawn by the coherence of his view of history, but as somebody (Anand, I think) very rightly pointed out, I was a great deal more successful in copying his faults. I owe another debt to Arnold Zweig, who must be the greatest living novelist today. What surprises me most is that critics have allowed themselves to be more impressed by factual 'colour' than by anything else in the book. In an age of reportage the novelist cannot hope to catch up with the eye-witnesses. When I began the book, I had no sources of first-hand information about Maquis activities. My total experience of France was three weeks in Calais. On the other hand, I believe it to be historically true that human beings act fundamentally alike in comparable circumstances. I drew my Maquisards chiefly on people I knew who had fought in the IRA, and my Gestapo on Tans and security officials whom I knew. The account of the Somme crossing came from the German official military journals. When I wrote that I knew everyone in the book I meant it perfectly seriously.

I think the novel makes my own political attitude pretty clear: one or two things in the reviews of it have amused me. An American critic thought that when I talked about the battle between the Thugs and the Humbugs I meant the Nazis and the French collaborators. I didn't. I believed when I wrote, and I believe now, that the European war, like every other war, is as relevant to the welfare of humanity as the pretorian wars that put up Nero or pulled down Gordian, save that now whole peoples have been engulfed. I believe that the peoples have lost, as they always lose. I believe that the only coherent form of political action in a barbarian social order is mutual aid and personal disobedience. I believe that all battles are lost and all national causes are fraudulent. All that remains is the staggering heroism and brutality of both sides in the pursuit of historical irrelevances. Your readers have to swallow so much if they are going to read *The Power House* — the book means that and nothing else, and anyone who tries to dilute it or apologise for it is misrepresenting my intention. But I am an enemy of society, not of humanity — civilisation goes on, and personally responsible action goes on within and in opposition to the structure of organised societies. We live now in a society where one must seek the civilised attitude, the practice of mutual aid, in places like the concentration camps and the

long-term convict prisons. Nobody in Dartmoor would willingly and without any prospect of personal gain have dropped an atomic bomb on a densely populated city from a sheer sense of military duty.

There is very little else about the book — most press critics seem to have missed the fact that Vernier's bomb blew up his old girlfriend on her honeymoon. I want to dedicate the book to everyone, both the murdered and the murderers — the only people to whom I do not dedicate it are the literary and political butchers' dogs who drive them and go home, with their eyes open, to a good dinner.

***Readers News*, January 1946**

ELEVEN

Science Must Disobey

In a few months, if the Atomic Energy Bill passes Parliament in its present form, it will become a penal offence in this country, for the first time since the Middle Ages, to conduct scientific investigation into an entire field of natural phenomena or to publish observations concerning them. While the public at large, intimidated by the prospect of the atom bomb, is likely to accept any measure for its control, scientists in general are increasingly aware of the extreme gravity of the threat which faces independent research. It is against the background of this profound disquiet that we must view the sentence upon Dr Nunn May. This vindictive and disgraceful sentence, which remains indefensible in the face of all argument about the obligations undertaken by state servants and in spite of the falsity of the position in which Dr May placed himself, is designed to intimidate research workers who have shown themselves increasingly unwilling to submit their judgment to that of policyless and irresponsible nationalists.

The seriousness of the threat contained in the new measure is hard to overstate. It is argued on behalf of the government that censorship will

be largely voluntary, that it will affect a minority of technical workers, and that it will not be abused to restrict the exchange of basic scientific information. These arguments are without weight. A voluntary censorship at the present time is most necessary — the nuclear workers of this war might well have imposed it to keep atomic energy out of the hands of the Allies — but the arbiters of such a censorship should not be the political leaders either of a national state or of the so-called United Nations, which is revealing itself as an organisation not for making peace but for making war.

The scientist has an absolute obligation to humanity before his conscience, and nobody can relieve him of it. A large element of the present impasse comes from the acquiescence of many leading workers, who cannot be wholly exonerated, in the staggering irresponsibility of the nuclear bomb project. But the suggestion that it is possible to impose secrecy in a particular field under threat of penal servitude without prejudice to the structure of research as a whole is lunacy. Science is as indivisible as it is responsible. Those who argue that atomic research can progress only in elaborately equipped laboratories will find little support in the history of physical research. From now on, mathematicians, biologists, medical radiologists, geneticists, and even field zoologists are involved: mathematical theorems arrived at by wholly theoretical processes, observations upon zoological mutation, and even vital statistics or studies of bird population run the risk of suppression upon military grounds. The continuation of scientific knowledge and research depends upon the free availability of all information to all workers, and censorship at any point can vitiate and delay the whole process of investigation.

There is no limit to the extension of this damnable conception of secrecy — we can consider ourselves lucky that the work on penicillin was not wholly suppressed from publication because it might decrease the severity of enemy war-disablement (it was in part suppressed during hostilities). The present measure is not a step to international goodwill, it is a substitute for foreign policy, a concession to the infantile nationalism which dominates both UNO and the private discussions of the foreign ministers. I believe that the time has come when scientific workers should seriously consider withdrawing their co-operation from all states and governments which continue to defy the general will of the peoples of the world and the general welfare of humanity. Just as the only hope of liberty and peace lies today in the recalcitrance of the public towards militarism and regimentation, so it is becoming the duty of science to

disobey. In the conflict between mankind and the conception of power, it cannot afford to remain silent or to be found upon the wrong side. If it does so, the progress of knowledge will be indefinitely arrested. There is a point at which personal disobedience becomes a moral duty. That point in the struggle against individual conscription and against the muzzling of responsible investigation has come today.

Common Wealth Review, **June 1946**

TWELVE

The Social Causes of Ill-Health

The physician is, perhaps, if he uses his eyes and his intellect, less reasonably susceptible than most people to the theory that capitalism is in the process of reform: but since he does not always use his eyes and his intellect, I can only hope that Dr Hewetson's book (*Ill-Health, Poverty and the State*, Freedom Press) will be read by his own profession. There is no lack of documentation here, and it is hard to believe that anything short of intellectual total blindness can fail to be disquieted to the point of conviction by this body of evidence. If any physician still requires to be convinced of the relation between poverty and sickness, Dr Hewetson should be able to convince him, but I do not regard this as the primary need — we all know it in theory, we all see it in practice; from out first day in hospital we see and know the bodies of the poor and can compare them with those of the rich, and what do we do about it? We preach reformism and centralisation. On the whole I believe that most of us make a sincere attempt not to have divers weights, to avoid truckling to our economic superiors and hectoring our public patients. But underlying every scheme of medicine for human betterment runs a facile and wholly unhistorical confidence in reform through the usual channels. We have a professional record of personal responsibility, we see with our eyes, but we remain content, even the best of us, with the free vitamins and

the compulsory notification, the treatment of illness, the alleviation of poverty, not the biological study and pursuit of health. Public health as we know it is not public health, but the more or less passive acceptance of public disease as an entity to be treated, not removed. The scholarly, factually documented indignation of this book should make us ashamed.

The increasing conviction which I have gained from all public health activities with which I have been in contact is not the malevolence of capitalism, which Engels was denouncing, but of the utter inherent impotence of its essays in benevolence. In the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution, the ill-health of the public, especially the working public, was destroyed by irresponsibility, chaos and callousness of capitalist society — now, in spite of the good intentions and the Labour majorities, it is as surely destroyed by the militarism, fear and endemic neurosis which have replaced, or rather supplements, them. If there is any point in which my experience differs from Dr Hewetson's, it is that while today the heaviest weight of social disease falls, as it always does, upon the poor, poverty is perhaps less a root cause than social barbarism, and the effects of megalopolitan living are spreading in altered forms to affect both the poor and the stateholders. Megalopolitanism has lowered the infant mortality in all income groups, but it has directly caused the increase in physical disorders in all groups. The poor are the hardest hit, but no member of a social order which is inherently inhuman is able to purchase immunity. Capitalism may be an ogre, but it is a blind Polyphemus-like ogre, diabolical in its malice and pathetic in its repentance, dogged by a social and biological Até which is part of its deformed structure. Against this background the niggardly treatment of the disabled, the lack of support for all non-homicidal research, the silicosis scandal, to cite notorious instances, are not deplorable accidents — they are a part of barbarian society: they are instruments of government.

The emphasis upon this fact, that the causes of endemic disease are not revealed by pathology nor even by economics but by sociology, and that social evils are almost entirely explicable in terms of power and government, of irresponsible society, needs to be repeated to socialists and liberals alike. They all share the rosy illusion of reform through a benevolent state, through public acts, legions of social workers, mass radiography, factory laws, the Party Programme, the mass of palliative and apologetic waste-paper. Tuberculosis today is again becoming prevalent: the reasons, inadequate hospital facilities, poor housing. Reform would have done away with all this, if it had not been for the war. The war was an unfortunate accident, unrelated to social events, to

politics, to the whole nexus of megalopolitan militarism. Given peace, the reformists will always undoubtedly succeed — but they will not be given peace. Tuberculosis tomorrow will be a direct result of the illiterate and incompetent buffoonery of UNO, the hysteria of Bikini, the bawlings and the swaggerings. It is not 'due to' the tubercle bacillus, it is 'due to' Mr Churchill, Adolf Hitler, megalopolitan London, megalomaniac policies, social irresponsibility. In the bacteriology of the future gonorrhoea will have as its aetiology not gonococcus but barbarian cities and military conscription, as surely as plague is 'due to' rats and Indian landlords, or silicosis to greed and power.

Against the reformist heresy, Hewetson hits hard and effectively. He stands in the tradition of the biology of health, the biology of Kropotkin, of which freedom from power is an integral and essential part. A barbarian society is incapable of health. However great its scientific achievements, they are tools it is incapable of using. Its evils are inherent, and with them its diseases. As Hewetson says, 'the reformists had never thought of that'. They have not. I do not see how any scientist, least of all a doctor, can fail to be an uncompromising revolutionary in the defence of responsible humanity. However much we may be obliged in conscience to share the work of mitigating the effects of the social order in which we live, our objectives can be nothing short of health and nothing short of freedom. It is to these objectives that Hewetson is recalling us, with a humane indignation which is in itself a high medical achievement. On his side is the whole weight of medical, sociological and political experience. The social neutrality of medicine is daily a more blatant contradiction in terms. If we are on the side of humanity, we can only take our places in the work of overthrowing barbarism, because barbarism, like the disease which it produces, are the enemies which our profession exists to defeat, in the general interest of man at all times, everywhere.

***Freedom*, 24th August 1946**

THIRTEEN

Philosophies in Little

Dear Derek Stanford,

You ask for a précis of my beliefs. Here is a letter-length version of them.

I start by being a biologist. I believe that man has one unique property, his power of intelligent foresight ('Prometheus' means that, of course) which makes him able to deal intelligently with his environment and at the same time gives him a great capacity for anxiety and fear.

I believe that there is no evidence that any of the things which human beings value (freedom, beauty, etc.) have any objective reality outside man, but that they are none the less valuable for that. They exist only while he asserts them against a hostile universe, and as long as he himself exists.

I believe in one ethical principle, the solidarity of man against death and ...against the human allies of death — those who side with Power. I recognise two obligations — to do nothing to increase the total of human suffering, and to leave nothing undone which diminishes it. For that reason I personally think I should split my time between letters and applied science, and do.

The emphasis on death in my *Elegies* is only one side of the statement, and isn't a reflection of pessimism, unless you think humanism pessimistic. 'Lazarus' represents my attitude to the other side of the subject, but there is a limit to the rate at which I write. I feel that art is concerned to state the problem, and science and direct action (not 'politics' but mutual aid) to solve it in so far as it can be solved.

I think this view is at root scientific, and if I find contrary evidence I'll certainly alter it — publicly — but at present it explains more observed facts than any other theory of reality which I know.

I don't know if these notes may make my ideas clearer. I hope so.

Yours,

Alex Comfort

***Resistance* (London), October 1946**

FOURTEEN

The Fate of the American Novel

The state of the modern American novel is even more socially dictated than that of our own. The entire mechanism of publishing in contemporary America has been thrown out of gear, not by a public demand for bad work, nor even by public intolerance of social criticism (the American public is infinitely more broadminded in its reading than in its attitudes — it swallowed Sinclair and Dreiser and Steinbeck and paid them handsomely), but by a kind of sweepstake mentality derived from the gigantic rewards which are involved in the production of a successful book. To Englishmen accustomed to the small, self-supporting publishing house, represented by dozens of self-contained businesses ready to consider nearly all the possible levels of writing, it is almost incredible that ninety per cent of novels issued by many American publishers are undertaken at an expected dead loss, in the interest of the greater or lesser literary jackpots on which the business is to be made profitable. For this state of affairs the high wage rates, unwillingness of printers to use machines for small impressions, and large overhead costs of commercial travelling in a large country are all to blame, but the highest single item is advertisments running into thousands of dollars, the amount spent on a forthcoming book being advertisements in the trade press to stimulate bookshop orders.

Demoralising as this is for the publisher, it is far more so for the author, and the last state of the socially responsible writer is frequently pitiable — a literary guzzler surrounded by tycoons to whom he has to be polite, writing drivel-scripts or war propaganda with as much cynicism as he can decently command, and revenging himself by slipping in satirical asides which may get through. The responsible literature of America, except for occasional successes, like those of Farrell and Faulkner, depends almost entirely on philanthropy, the export of manuscripts to England, and luck. I doubt if one American edition of Miller, Patchen, Rexroth, or even many editions of Faulkner or the pre-collaborationist Steinbeck paid their way: Laughlin runs New Directions, the most progressive of the literary publishing houses, at a loss of some $15,000 annually, publishing work which in England, published by a concern of

the size and status of, say, Hogarth Press or Grey Walls Press, would cover costs easily and would be unlucky if it did not show a profit of a few hundred pounds. Writers who publicly underrate the temptation of money are certainly not proof against concrete offers in nine cases out of ten, and the collapse of fiction-writers one after another into acquiescence is even more depressing than it would be if state censorship prevented anyone non-acquiescent from being printed openly. The lack of any middle term between dead loss and a financial bonanza makes it impossible for publishers to keep their minds off the sure thing.

The 'sure thing' is the moronic composite novel, written in collaboration by advertising agents and script-writers, in which normal sexuality is taboo but sadism essential, political thought replaced by operatic attitudes, and the whole puffed with a figurehead author, usually a female good-looker, and groomed for filming. In view of these conditions it is astounding that the best-seller market should be worth study. It has produced no great novels, but several very interesting ones. I am thinking of books like *North-West Passage* (excluding the superadded irrelevant second half, which is not part of the picture) or *Anthony Adverse*, an astounding combination of goodness and badness: this book seems in the aggregate to be a successful illusion in genre-writing, a novelistic equivalent of *Hassan* or Rimsky's *Scheherazade*, which may be irritating but for which it is hard not to feel some respect. The mechanics of the situation make it almost inevitable that it should be the author's first book which is the best, the others representing downward degrees of conformity, *Of Mice and Men* compared with *The Moon is Down*, or Sinclair then with Sinclair now, or Hemingway the novelist with Hemingway the war reporter.

The state of English publishing, as regards the novel, is nothing like so discouraging. There is a common illusion among readers, fostered by unsuccessful writers, that vast numbers of manuscripts of genius are in some way suppressed, either by the commercialism of publishers or the stupidity of the public. It is important for intelligent readers to recognise that at present very nearly everything which is publishable at any of the many levels of fiction has an outlet. The rewards of the financially successful author being nothing like as dazzling as in the United States, novels are written either as a regular employment, like making boots, or out of conviction, or from a compulsion to shine without taking any socially unacceptable action to draw notice on oneself. In spite of what I have said about the 'serious' intention of the novel, I have no quarrel with the purely manufactured product except insofar as it competes

unfairly for the talent of potential writers and is acquiescent, collaborationist, and safe. I do not think that fiction has played any serious part in 'debauching public taste' or any of the other activities attributed to lowbrow novels by those who dislike them. Nor are the intentionally bad works, produced to measure, serious except as a symptom. The only really serious mischief which can be done by fiction, from the social viewpoint, occurs when a previously progressive or reputedly progressive novelist is bought up.

***Freedom*, 26th July 1947 (included in *The Novel and Our Time*, 1948)**

FIFTEEN

The Kinsey Report

The survey entitled *Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male*, which has lately appeared in America, may prove to be a document whose entirely unrehearsed political consequences are as great as its contribution to science. A statistical survey of the sexual experience of a population sample made up of 12,000 males may have no obvious bearing, in title, upon political thought, but as anarchism is coming to rely more and more for its support upon social psychology and anthropology, those who accept it as a hypothesis cannot afford to neglect any new evidence. In the field of pure science both sociology and psychology have been handicapped wherever they attempt to deal with sexual phenomena by a complete lack of data. Sexual experience is not freely discussed in modern western societies, and the attitude of the law and of public opinion to many of its manifestations is not likely to induce individuals to admit their own histories. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, all forms of sexual activity other than heterosexual coitus were regarded as sins against nature: with the growth of psychiatry, increasing numbers of patients admitted their atypical or unacceptable impulses to doctors, and as a result such phenomena as homosexuality and masturbation came

to be regarded as diseases or congenital abnormalities. Since then, with the extension of analytical psychology, estimates of the incidence of homosexual phenomena have become progressively higher, but in no case were adequate statistical data available. We were therefore dealing with an entity of which it was impossible to say whether it was statistically normal or not, whether it was increasing, and whether it showed any definite clinical distribution. A similar lack of data existed, and still exists, in almost all branches of sexual physiology and psychology.

The work of Kinsey and his collaborators appears to be statistically unassailable. Elaborate precautions have been taken against all possible forms of selection-error, and details of these, and of the procedure of interviewing, occupy almost a quarter of the book. It is extremely striking that in a questionnaire of this kind, dealing with subjects which carry the strongest social and emotional defensive reaction, the public co-operated without the least demur. The tact and patience of the investigators, combined with the genuine desire of most people to assist science, and the striking integrity with which the whole survey was conducted, deserve the highest praise. The difficulties of anthropological work among civilised peoples are far greater than among savages. Extreme pressure was brought to bear on the investigators by outside bodies, attempts were made to get their grant cancelled or themselves arrested, but the individual patient, and the Board of the University of Indiana, stood by them remarkably well.

The preliminary results deal only with white males, but they are of a character which is bound to produce a far-reaching revolution in medical thought. It is impossible to summarise 600 pages of print of importance in a brief review, but the main points of importance are these.

In the first place, the extreme commonness of a large number of sexual practices which have been regarded for centuries as abnormal involves a reversal of much which has been thought and written on the 'sexual psychopathies'. Of the total male population examined, more than a third had had at least one homosexual experience to the point of orgasm. Intercourse with animals, which has long been regarded as uncommon and a stigma of mental deficiency or low intelligence, reached 17 per cent in the rural communities and bore no relation to apparent mental defect. The incidence of intercourse with prostitutes and of extramarital and premarital relations far exceeded the estimates which have been made in the past. Other astounding results were those which covered the frequency of sexual outlet. The aggregate result of the data is the overthrow of entire statistical conception of 'normality' on which many

ideas in social morality have been based. Homosexuality as a clinical entity cannot be seriously upheld in the face of evidence that human behaviour shows an imperceptible gradation from the wholly heterosexual to the wholly homosexual. The variety of the experience which is statistically normal to the male population concerned is far greater than could have been guessed.

Second, all racial and climatic differences, and even differences of religion, were insignificant compared with the differences existing between the various educational levels. A breakdown of the sample on a basis of education was simplified by the form of the American educational system. The mores (social or group attitudes) of these levels differed as widely as those of separate nations. The lowest groups regarded all forms of pre-coital play, as well as masturbation, as abnormal or immoral, but indulged widely in premarital intercourse (over ninety per cent) while the college levels reject premarital and extramarital intercourse but accept masturbation and 'petting' as normal and desirable. Moreover, the patterns of conduct accepted and rejected at each level show only slight variation over three generations, a point of great interest in view of the opinions which have been expressed regarding the effects of war and of social change, and the 'collapse of morals' among youth.

Third, the law relating to sexual offences does not coincide with the mores of any one group, even the ruling or dominant educational level. The attitude of the law in America, and in this country, had been that no form of sexual expression should be tolerated except that which is essential to procreation, namely intramarital heterosexual coitus. No level of the population accepts this view. As a result, Kinsey estimates that at least eight out of ten American males have at some time engaged in sexual behaviour which would, if detected, lay them open to punishment. It is many years now since Ouspensky put forward the view that prohibitive legislation originates in the under-sexed members of any ruling group, on a basis not far removed from 'sour grapes'. Kinsey shows that of a group whose views on sexual morality were known, the most strict and the closest to the legal attitude were those whose normal rate of outlet was low, and least strict in those in whom it was high.

Yet another conclusion based on the survey is that sublimation, which has been invoked by a very large section of opinion to defend abstinence, is 'an academic possibility rather than fact', and that it exists only in those whose rate of outlet is in fact on the low side of normal.

The importance of such data in all fields of social reform is obvious. It is necessary to point out that data derived from an American population

cannot be transferred bodily to this country, and that the statistical prevalence of a given practice is not evidence that it is socially desirable, but anarchists, who in general adopt the rationalist view that no form of behaviour is unacceptable unless is has demonstrable ill effects on the individual or on others, will find much material to encourage their attitude. It is particularly important to notice that in this field of conduct, where impulsive and instinctive patterns of action are extremely strong, the conduct of the individual bears no relation to the law, but is determined by a system of mores which he acquires from education and group attitudes, and which are fixed by the age of sixteen. This strongly suggests that conduct which cannot be modified by external institutions can be modified by changes in group belief, and supports the contention of sociology since Godwin that laws are an ineffective means of forming social conduct compared with education. Even more interesting is the fact, observed by these investigators, that many instances which are brought up as examples of delinquency are in fact instances of conflict between group taboos. The child who is found to display any kind of adolescent sexual activity, if he comes to the notice of an upper-level social worker, is likely to be regarded as in need of treatment or punishment, while in fact similar conduct is general in the group concerned. The police, coming from lower-level groups, regard masturbation as a perversion and premarital coitus as normal — the judge, from another level, regards the first as normal and the second as criminal. Similar differences exist between the psychiatrist, the probation officer, the journalist, the prison governor, and the warder. Our attitude towards penal reform in sexual offences must also undergo radical changes. We have concentrated in the past on ensuring that 'abnormal' subjects are not punished for their supposed illness: it now becomes plain that in treating them we are in fact treating not abnormalities but expressions of sexuality which are general if not normal.

Kinsey's work is presented with a praiseworthy absence of subjective comment, but the conclusions which must be drawn from it are inescapable. A pioneer work in a field of great biological interest, the book deserve the close attention of every intelligent reader.

***Freedom*, 1st May 1948**

SIXTEEN

Whither Israel?

Twice in the last half-century English 'progressives' have seen a similar historical event under similar circumstances. In 1916 Pearse and Connolly captured the imagination of the world in the Easter Rising, and set in motion by that gesture the foundation of Saorstat Eireann. Today the Zionists have declared the State of Israel. Reactions among English progressives are, I think, similar to those which attended Easter Week — keen sympathy with a courageous attempt to secure freedom, contempt for the official attitude of the British government, and a measure of disquiet. The events leading up to each situation have been strikingly alike: terrorism and counter-terrorism are not new, nor are anti-Irish and anti-Jewish feeling. It is not a patronising or an unfriendly approach which makes the disquiet, nor is it a failure to recognise the achievements and sufferings of Jewry.

In historical and social terms, the Jews have many advantages over the Irish Republicans. They have created the most striking examples of social community in the present period. The importance of social societies such as the settlements, existing in a world which is increasingly asocial, is not confined to the people who live in them. It extends into far wider circles of study — sociology, anthropology, the planning of the free society in all countries. It is not too much to say that the future orientation of all anti-totalitarian planning will be determined by the fate of these experiments. The republicanism of the Irish has parallels — the practical achievement in Palestine seems to me unique. It is for precisely this reason that the hazards attending the birth of Israel seem to me greater than those which Ireland faced, and to some extent failed to overcome, after the deaths of Pearse and Connolly.

Non-Jews cannot expect to preach to the Jews — the suffering of Jewry in recent years has no parallel in Irish history, or anywhere else, perhaps, save in Jewish history. But the chronicity of that suffering is in itself a danger. It has left Jewry a legacy which is far more important than Gentile anti-Semitism — in the attitude of mind which has developed between Jews and non-Jews, and the whole crop of psychological tensions which go with it. There is a radical difference between the ill-feeling which

existed between Ireland and Britain in 1916 and the kind of ill-feeling which has existed between Jews and non-Jews. The real curse of anti-Semitism is that it infects the attitude both of people who are not anti-Semitic and of Jews themselves. I think that if I were a Jew I would find it easier to know where I was with an anti-Semite than the the studiously 'decent' Englishman who is so obsessed with anti-Semitism and with showing that he doesn't share it that he adopts the same insulting attitude towards Jews that some people adopt towards dumb animals. And the Jews themselves have over-reacted — it is hard to see how they could do otherwise: the 'decent' Englishman hasn't had to put up with Jewish history, Hitler, the gas chambers, and Ernest Bevin. You need only compare the emotional effects of a comedian's gag about Irishmen with those of a comedian's gag about Jews to see the difference. Until comedians can make such jokes equally, and nobody feel uneasy, one cannot say that Jewish-Gentile relationships are at a natural level. Non-Jews have a substantial guilt-reaction to live down before then, though the autonomy of Israel is a step on the way.

Why am I uneasy about a Jewish State? Because I am uneasy about any state. I am never ready to support uncritically the birth of a new authority. Israel is still struggling to exist, it is surrounded by every kind of force and chicanery, by foreign intervention and by international intrigues. I can understand why a state was founded, but the very centralising of authority seems to me to be a threat rather than an aid to the victory of Zionism. The Jewish people have shown themselves uniquely capable of living together in a non-coercive, defensible, social society. If that unique pattern is replaced by the orthodox pattern of government, ministries, parliaments, presidents and prisons, the future of free institutions far outside the circle of Jewry will be at risk. An anarchist Israel would possess a far greater power of survival in present world circumstances than any centralised state based on power, and Jewry is uniquely able to found such a society. A State of Israel modelled upon orthodox power institutions will be drawn inevitably into the pattern of Great Power intrigue.

These are not unfriendly criticisms. It is because I recognise the immense significance of the experimental societies developed in Palestine that I make it at all — if the Jews had done less, one could be content to regard them as yet another people trying to secure equality of status with other national powers. Jewry is more than that — it is a moral force: not in the same sense that the Orthodox Jewish believer might use the word, but because the Jews are the sole civilised group who have learned

through a long history of dispossession to retain the basic human pattern of mutual aid. Because they have lived in many states and owed total allegiance to none, the Jews are possibly the only whole human beings, in the social and biological sense, who still exist as a group in Western Europe. There is a strand of this wholeness in Ireland, and it is the only thing which has enabled Eire to survive. The infection of Israel with orthodox power institutions, under pressure of danger, would be a disaster. I do not think that defence and efficiency depend on the creation of such institutions. If the Palestinians have possessed the self-discipline to do what they have done so far, they are strong enough to defend themselves and to live without a system of political authority.

***New Israel*, Summer 1948**

SEVENTEEN

On Defending a Telephone Exchange

England and America are no longer defensible, in spite of General Montgomery. When I say that, I am not thinking only, or even chiefly, of atomic and bacterial weapons. Generals, I imagine, rely on our marshalling enough bluff or enough retaliatory power to prevent a trial of weapons. Bombs and material destruction, moreover, have been, and can be, survived, and they only abolish patterns of culture which are predominantly material or architectural. Our own culture is highly vulnerable for this reason, but we are basically indefensible because of the way in which we live.

The changes in our patterns of living have gone so far since Marx and Engels that some of their comment on historical forces looks as archaic as a full-bottomed wig. To the economic factors of the Industrial Revolution, which began the present process, we have to add innumerable new factors, previously overlooked. To Marxism we have to add social anthropology, and we revise in adding.

Marx would have recognised that a society which contained a vocal proletariat could not be defended (by the management) in an imperialist war. It would explode into socialist revolution. Our society is indefensible by reason of entirely different internal strains, and under the stress of preparation for war and the consequences of war, successful or unsuccessful, it would explode, probably without re-forming into any organised pattern.

A proletariat, a body of dispossessed people attempting to secure its rights, is a social unit. You can rally it, organise it as a mob or a class, and base your estimate of its probable conduct on knowledge of the common attitudes of its members to one another and to other classes. Dispossession in contemporary urban society, both here and in America, is of an entirely different kind. It is biological rather than economic, it affects the management as well as the citizens, and where it is canalised into overt acts, those acts tend to take the form, not of revolutionary action, but of individual delinquency or communal aggression. The economic proletariat had nothing to lose but its chains; the dispossessed today , as they figure in social anthropology or attend out-patient clinics, have lost everything but their identity.

A Marxist proletariat, where you still find it, in Glasgow or on the East Side, is fundamentally social. It is held together by a solidarity of personal relationships which has to be experienced to be appreciated. The indefensible, asocial dispossessed, kids in the juvenile court, or company directors in the York Clinic, are in solitary confinement. Like the proletariat of earlier days, the focus is urban, but its attitudes control national attitudes. The defence of England means, largely, the defence of cities, and the city pattern becomes the weakest link in the chain.

The term 'asocial society' seems to be due in the first place to Patrick Geddes. You can construct a model of it easily and accurately. Think of a city full of people who never leave their houses, but are connected singly to headquarters by one-way telephone. The telephone system controls for them nearly all the activities which have formerly occupied human time. Their football is played by professional footballers, and laid on; their function in public order is delegated to professional police; their artistic expression is delegated to professional artists and musicians; their sex is delegated to professional film stars. Their public actions are those of the mob connected only by telephone.

The management itself consists of individuals who are equally emptied of personal relationships and activities, but who happen to be at the transmitting end of the system. When they talk aloud they are overheard,

and what they say is the only external directive which the listeners perceive. Perched on top of this pyramid of individuals, they show as clearly as the listeners the effects of loneliness and boredom; but, like a man who is ordered to carry the packs of an entire company, they are subject to greater stresses, and their tantrums, their fears and their prejudices radiate over the entire system of telephones. For all those individuals, the only entity to which the name Society can be applied is the mechanical and electrical system of the exchange.

It is a society in which the family is the largest coherent group, but a family whose members drop off early, and whose survival as a unit is limited; in which most people do not know the name of their next-door neighbour but two; in which individual activities are almost wholly limited to techniques — a society of congested, well equipped, insecure onlookers. It has very few social sanctions and a profound sense of guilt, which it cannot control by conforming to an accepted norm or making recognised atonement. Anxiety, as BO or as 'blood, tears and sweat', is its main driving force, corresponding to the yells and shots by which cowboys propel steers. It cannot be 'defended' because there is nothing to defend, except buildings and paper, the wiring of the exchange. And the wires, the uniselectors and the telephone relays are God, to which, if it pays any homage, homage is paid and responsibility admitted.

War does not come to such a community in the guise of an opportunity, as it may come to an economic proletariat, though it may come as a relief. In the last war, danger and destruction revived older patterns of sociality on a national scale. People actually spoke to strangers, and had an objective — 'winning'. The physical manning of defences could still be carried out — morale, the measure of readiness with which the telephone bell is obeyed, became something more significant. Atom bombs might conceivably act in the same way. It is against the preparation of war, the break-up of surviving but precarious family relations and individual structures of living, the government by sustained anxiety, that it has no power of resistance; nor has it against victory, the necessity of going back as individuals to objectless and unoccupied loneliness. Defeat may save such a society by giving it a respectable and legitimate focus for its pent-up desire to smash things — victory is rapidly fatal to it.

How such societies end, and how they can be altered, social anthropology does not yet know for certain — sometimes they collapse into tyrannies or deserts, sometimes, like the Byzantine Empire, they draw stumps and go home. Our own is the first to come under contemporary scientific observation. If it can be understood it may possibly be altered

by the re-focusing of individual aggression from external outlets such as nationalism or anti-Semitism into intelligent disobedience. But its capacity for military defence, in a period when cities are indefensible, and the rural, more social areas depend upon the city for their living and their direction, is nil. It will take more fundamental measures than addresses from the balcony of the Mansion House to restore the security of Western cultures.

The New Statesman and Nation, **6th November 1948**

EIGHTEEN

The Right Thing To Do

When I was asked to give this talk, I said I would try to speak from the viewpoint of a scientific worker, and it is not easy to do that. If you want to know the way to prevent accidents to deep sea divers, or how to cure a disease of fruit trees, you can call on the appropriate branch of science to give you the answer: the scientist may be able to help you from what he already knows, or he may have to devise experiments to get you the information you want, but the benefit you derive from consulting him will depend on your giving him the right problem in the right terms. What you can get from science is not a rule of life, but information, and I want to tell you how I interpret the information available, and how I personally use it in deciding how to act.

When I have a decision to make on an issue of conduct, I use equipment which is part of myself as a human being. I have my reason, and I have my conscience, or moral sense, if you like. What most of us want to know, I think, is whether studies such as psychology and sociology can throw any light on this moral sense — whether it is reliable, what it is, and what it signifies. There is the religious view, that it is a spiritual force within us, pointing to God or to an absolute standard of goodness, rather as a magnetic needle points north; and there is the relativistic view, that

it is a gyro-compass which only holds to the bearing upon which it is set. You see the importance of the difference. If my moral sense is consistent, and if it does in fact respond to some external standard, whether that standard is the will of God or a property of the universe, then I can refer to God or the universe as I can refer to the National Physical Laboratory when I want to check the accuracy of a thermometer or a balance. That was what Kant must have had in mind when he said that nothing proved the existence of deity so clearly as the starry heaven and the conscience within us. To which Freud replied that conscience is certainly something within us, but it has not always been there. We owe its shape to the shape of the family, to the fact that for anything up to fifteen years our parents are, for most purposes, our conscience, and to the kind of society in which we are brought up.

If absolute standards of moral behaviour were a part of the fabric of things, I should expect to find signs of them in the physical universe. But I cannot see any such signs apart from man and his attempts to find goodness and justice. The Victorian agnostics were very careful indeed to make it plain that in rejecting religious revelation they were not rejecting absolute standards of behaviour, because they feared, and many people still fear, that unless there is some objective standard of goodness one cannot say that any action is better than any other. I think that is a fallacy, and I think it arose because of the tendency which we all exhibit, when we are dealing with something unfamiliar, to make a model in terms of what we know.

I believe that there are standards of conduct, but that they have been evolved by man — and do not exist in nature apart from man. We can go further, I think, and say that right and wrong, like the appreciation of beauty, are something confined to man — a private joke of the human species. Outside man, in the natural order, I can see some signs of consistency and relationship but no signs of moral purpose. And following from that, I believe that if there were only one human being left, the terms right and wrong would not have any intelligible meaning so far as he was concerned. The Christian would say that such a sole survivor could still choose between right and wrong, because he could accept or reject a moral relationship with God. I believe that right conduct depends on the fact that men live in societies: the sole survivor I mention could do no wrong, because he could harm nobody, and could do no right, because he could help nobody.

I think you will agree if a man is really the only part of the natural order for which goodness or beauty have meaning, moral decisions become not less but more important. These human standards will exist

only so long as we uphold them. And we are bound together by the fact that we have two struggles — one against the environment which threatens our existence and one against the threat to the values which we have discovered, whether it comes from the physical order or from other human beings who endanger it by concentrating upon themselves and their own comfort and power.

If I am going to apply these conclusions, I must use my moral sense. How much can I find out about it from experimental science? In the last twenty years we have learned a great deal about our moral sense, and we can begin to gauge its reliability. Let us begin with the individual. If I look at modern work in psychology, I find that conscience is a part of a far larger mechanism of censorship, which determines not only what I think right, but also which impulses and ideas I am able to think about tranquilly, and which make me so uncomfortable that I dodge them and push them out of consciousness. This censorship is only partly concerned with rational morals; much of it works at an entirely irrational, nursery level. I find I have to recognise aggressive impulses in myself — and even the part of my system of standards which is directly concerned with conduct can make me so uncomfortable if I disobey it that I am very likely to do one thing from an unconscious motive and then pretend to my moral conscience that it is really something different. Nevertheless, I also find that I can determine my own standards by reason. And before I can get a true picture of the reliability of moral sense I must look not only at the data for the single individual, but also at those for human beings living in groups.

It has often been denied that man is really a moral animal at all — people have said that he is too selfish, cruel and unreliable to qualify for such a title; you remember 'the heart of a man is corrupt and desperately wicked'. Is it true? I do not think a sociologist would say that it is. What do we believe about the individual? Freud's discoveries frightened some people: they revealed forces outside our conscious control, but still a part of ourselves, about which we knew very little. They showed us that anti-social impulses are there and they showed us how easily we can be deceived over our own motives. But they did not reveal original sin in the religious sense — and there seems to be nothing in our knowledge of the individual which suggests a basic flaw in our moral nature such as is implied by the doctrine of the Fall. Primitive societies are many of them far more able to reach sound judgments of conduct than we are today.

Analytical psychology teaches me to distrust my own motives. Sociology teaches me that provided I act as a human being, my human nature

is not a trap, and I can reasonably trust my social impulses. And it points to another important principle. Human beings are social as long as they recognise one another as human beings. At the personal level we have certain common ground for our social actions. Once that relationship breaks down in any society, and particularly if we begin to treat institutions and conceptions as if they were human individuals, to individualise a group to which we belong, and transfer our responsibility from our neighbour to it, then our social sense shows increasing signs of breakdown, and we are left with a moral deficiency covering our whole public conduct, however well we may behave in our home or our street. And when I have to decide how far I can accept the directions and the laws of a centralised state as guides to my conduct, I have to remember that a centralised state is one of these stuffed substitutes for responsibility. Power in society is a product, not of responsibility crystallised, but of group aggression. And however just and honourable the members of a government may be in their private lives, their social sense is bearing a weight which it was never designed to carry. One man can carry one pack. It is inviting failure to attempt to carry the packs of an entire army. The greater the concentration of authority, the greater the strain on those who accept it, the greater the likelihood that psychopaths will come to the top, and that those who do come to the top will be psychopathic.

Our moral sense only functions reliably in the type of relationship which exists between individuals: if I allow myself to swallow my conscience in deference to a graven image, however laudable, or if I allow myself to exercise a position of coercive power, my social sense will fail me exactly as it has failed every generation of rulers, whatever their standards and whatever their intentions. So I look upon it as my duty, in view of what I have learned about the mechanism of human relationships, not only to resist bad laws, but also to refuse to exercise power, either in politics, in personal affairs, or by adopting a dictatorial attitude towards my family, because if I accept power I remove my actions out of the field of human moral sense into the field where Hitler's intuitions, 'my country right or wrong', and 'Father knows best' all find common ground.

In everyday life I have to apply these beliefs to the choices I make. How do they help me to decide what I should do and what I should refuse to do? I can put it best by quoting the last novel of Albert Camus, *The Plague*: 'I know that in this world there are pestilences and there are victims, and it is up to us not to ally ourselves with the pestilences.'

Power is one of these pestilences, war is another. There are physical pestilences, the diseases and the discomforts of the accidents — my

reason for undertaking scientific work at all is that it is part of the business of abolishing them. But in everyday life the rule which I use is a reasonably concise one. I am responsible for seeing that I do nothing which harms any other human being, and I leave nothing undone which can reduce the amount of preventable suffering and failure. And I find that in making quick judgements in complicated cases — and almost all the cases are complicated in modern society — conscience is a reliable instrument. If I stop to argue the benefit to humanity in abstract terms, I am much more likely to find myself acquiescing in something like Belsen than if I follow my human sense.

And the second rule I can recommend you is this: in your public conduct, when you are asked to choose between a personal action which causes suffering and a hypothetical evil which will result if you refuse, choose the hypothetical evil. Anything I agree to do will be done. I am responsible for it. If I drop this atom bomb, I shall obliterate Hiroshima. If I refuse, the inhabitants of Hiroshima may set up a tyranny. I choose the tyranny, not because I am prepared to compromise with it, but because its creation will depend on other people's judgements, not mine, and I may be being deceived. Man is adjusted to function in a social society; in such a society, our consciences would have a direct check from the social group. Today, in contemporary society, we have nothing to guide us but the state, and the state is not a human being, or even a socially responsible group of human beings. You might be willing to drop the atomic bomb, or to agree to its being dropped in a good cause, but you would not deal with the population of Hiroshima singly with a sword, whatever benefits to humanity were promised you. Faced with a decision in private life or in public duty, the Jew will refer to the Law of God, and the Catholic to the teaching of the church, and the Protestant Christian to his interpretations of what God would wish, or what Christ would have done. I would try to refer to the standard I have given you, the standard of humanity which is the foundation of scientific humanism.

This responsibility is twofold — a positive duty to remember that you are a human being, and a negative duty of disobedience to irrational and anti-human instructions. Josef Kramer, of Belsen, has been described as a respectable man who thought he was doing his duty. That may be true or false, but as often as we allow the standards of a group which is based on power to supersede our personal responsibility as an individual to individuals, we become like him. And the choice rests with us.

BBC talk, December 1948, published as a Peace News Pamphlet and in *Freedom*, 24th December 1948

NINETEEN

The Wrong Thing To Do

I think a great many of us here tonight must be finding it hard not to imagine ourselves back in 1936, at a meeting in this very hall, where we were saying the same things as we are going to say tonight — or rather, other people said them and I listened. I can imagine some people who listened to pacifists them and are listening again now, asking themselves if we have learned nothing in twelve years. That is a question we have to answer.

I think we have learned a great deal. I think that in standing up here and telling the public that the way to prevent war is to resist it at home, to resist it even when it calls itself defence, and even when the enemy is an acknowledged enemy of individual freedom, we are finding it harder to make facile statements about the power of goodwill; harder, if you like, to discount the wickedness of governments or the blindness of peoples. If our line tonight is the same as it was in 1936, that is not because we have failed to learn from events. It is, I would say, because we have learned from events. It is that body of opinion which still talks as though military defence were a practicable policy which has failed to move with the times.

Is the situation today really the same as it was before Munich? I think everyone here is familiar with the arguments for the view that it is — arguments which are being used to warn us against appeasing tyrants, and to make us support two alternatives to appeasing them: preventive war, and preventive armament. I do not think it is unjust to say that those who were foremost in appeasing fascism are now foremost in urging us not to repeat their own unfortunate mistakes. But is the situation really the same?

In 1936 we knew that war, even if we won it, would devastate Europe and set back the progress of civilisation all over the world. Today we can see that that has happened. There are some people who would argue that the defeat of fascism was worth the price. We can say now, with equal certainty, that another war, whether we won it or lost it, would bring European civilisation as we know it to an end. Its results would be such that, after it, there would be no context in which victory or defeat,

for ourselves or anyone else, would have any intelligible meaning. That is not a pacifist view. It is conceded, I think, by everyone who knows the facts. It is conceded by the government when they appeal for support in a policy of rearmament and defence. They believe that by defence they can prevent war.

I want to suggest to you that the case against that view, the case which we are presenting when we ask you to refuse to support that policy, rests on something more than a general dislike of weapons and of training in violence. It is perfectly true that the arguments which pacifists used in 1936 still have force; it is true that demonstrations of strength like the atomic bomb have always resulted in a hardening of attitude in the people they were meant to intimidate; it is still true that the most certain way of rallying a country behind a tyrannical government is to declare war on it, or threaten it with war; and it is still true that a crusade against Russia would stain our hands, as individuals, with exactly the same beastliness which we professed to oppose in fascism. But the real argument which I would like all of you to consider, and particularly those who were not convinced by the pacifism of 1936, comes not from morals or politics, but from science. It is perfectly true that our institutions are threatened by the growth of totalitarianism, and *that* totalitarianism is not wholly manufactured in Russia or in Germany. But English civilisation, and we, and humanity, are far more seriously threatened by starvation and by the collapse of our mental and social health. On one hand, the population of the world is outrunning its food supply; on the other, the consequences of industrialism, and particularly the destruction of social patterns which industrialism has caused, threaten to bring down not only our civilisation, but all civilisation.

Now we can deal with these threats. Science is competent to answer them, I believe, but we can only meet them if we do so with our whole energies. The diversion of our society to military activities today will destroy it just as certainly as atom bombs or foreign occupation — more certainly, in fact. I am not speaking only of waste of resources. To pursue a policy of armed preparedness in the type of society which exists today, you must rely not only on making defence the major industry of the country, but on encouraging fear and hysteria. And if we persist in encouraging fear and hysteria, we shall inevitably destroy our social life and our capacity for rational policy. Since tyranny and totalitarianism are symptoms, in themselves, of this kind of destruction, we shall be quickening the pace at which these attitudes grow. We shall be fighting against ourselves, and it will not be a very striking consolation if the

result does not happen to be called Communism. I think I can say to you, with the full backing of modern social psychology, that if war-scares and conscription last for another five years we shall have made some such total collapse inevitable. Events will have passed out of our hands.

The choice we are facing is not the choice which is put before us by those who talk about another Munich. The choice is not between knuckling under to totalitarianism and risking war in order to resist it. It is between putting the possibility of war, defensive or offensive, out of our calculations, whatever the risks and whatever the consequences, and accepting the end of European history as we know it. There is no third choice. I am not minimising the risks, any more than those who advocated war against Hitler imagined that we should win it without casualties. If totalitarianism gains ground, we must resist it by the only means which are effective against it — by personal disobedience and personal opposition. We have come to underrate the power of the individual, but in a highly centralised society resistance of that kind is more effective than it has ever been. There is nothing in the story of European resistance to Hitler which contradicts that view. But by making it clear to the governments of this country and of America that they will not have the support of their public in organising the suicide of Europe to prevent its enslavement, we can take positive action to hinder tendencies at home which lead towards totalitarianism.

We can, I believe, use our greater degree of freedom to hearten the countries which have lost theirs. The risks have to be taken. The risks of war and war preparation are not risks, they are historical certainties. And the choice lies with us as individuals, upon whose support all systems of society, free and servile, must ultimately depend. Let us set our own house in order.

Speech at PPU meeting, January 1949, published in a Peace News Pamphlet

TWENTY

Keep Endless Watch

There is a fairly substantial case for representing Albert Camus as the most important living novelist. The case rests upon his stylistic and imaginative scope, but still more upon the fact that he is the only important writer who has shown, in his first few novels, a willingness to deal with the fundamental characters of the age he lives in, and an ability to see what those characters are.

Camus's first novel, *The Outsider*, was a documented study of a new yet typical figure of modern urban societies — the affectless delinquent. Mersault is under sentence of death because, as he says, he failed to weep enough at his mother's funeral. He has helped a friend to write a disgraceful letter to an Arab girl, and has shot an Arab, her brother, in the feud which follows. None of this is his business. He views the whole thing with an air of sincere detachment. When his mistress asks him if he will marry her, he says that he has no views. When he is asked if he realises that murder is wrong, he has no views. When his mother dies in the workhouse, he has no views, and because the prosecuting counsel plays up his heartlessness he is about to have his head chopped off in the name of the French Republic. At least he hopes there will be a decent turn-out to watch the ceremony.

The brilliance of this study is in the blend of candour and lack of insight with which Mersault described himself. His favourite phrase is 'So what?' He is not tough so much as stunted, not vicious so much as utterly emptied of sociality. He is a terrifying clinical picture of one of the main psychiatric problems of a century. One need only compare him with Greene's Pinky in *Brighton Rock*, a rather similar figure, to measure Camus against the modern English novel. Greene is no dwarf, but Camus has the ingredients of a giant.

When *The Plague* appeared in England a large majority of critics took it as reportage, as a straightforward unallegorical attempt to report an epidemic. People talked about Defoe. Both Camus and his French friends are credibly reported to have been flabbergasted by this kind of comment. We have got so unused to masterly narrative writing that some of us fail to see beyond it. But those who are studying the epidemiology of this

same plague can throw up their hats and acclaim a brilliant investigation. Camus has not only isolated the germ — after all, Mersault was a typical case history — but he has described the whole syndrome. In this epidemic we are all infected. The most we can do is take reasonably curative and prophylactic measures. The plague is irresponsibility.

Tarrou, shut in the quarantined city, is the son of a public prosecutor. It is when he sees his father 'in his red gown', browbeating another Mersault and howling for his death that he first recognises the other, the intangible Plague. His father asks one day for an alarm clock. He has to rise early in his official capacity to witness the execution. When he gets back Tarrou has left home. In an attempt to get the responsibility for the Plague out of his system he fights for every lost cause in Europe. He himself sentences people to death 'for the cause' — but do people realise that a firing squad makes not a neat round hole, but a ditch you could put your fist in? No, it isn't nice to discuss such things — 'for the plague-stricken their peace of mind is more important than human life ... I came to understand that I, anyhow, had had plague through all those long years in which, paradoxically enough, I believed with all my soul that I was fighting it'. He has always rationalised his own responsibility for murder, as his father had done, in terms of Benthamite 'greatest good'. But it was still the victim, the poor owl in the dock, 'with that foul procedure whereby dirty mouths stinking of the plague told a fettered man that he was going to die and scientifically arranged things so that he should die,' who stuck in Tarrou's throat.

Camus is on the verge of something that is already filtering into psychiatry — the identity of the ruler in modern urban cultures with the criminal, the fact that power and authority as we know them, with their most important activity, killing, whether by atom bomb, gallows or assassination, are themselves the enemies of society, and that power itself is the Plague, with which we all, through acquiescence, are infected. The passage in which Tarrou elaborates this idea to Rieux, the doctor, is possibly the most important single passage of its kind since Dostoevsky wrote the story of the Grand Inquisitor. Unlike that, however, it is the direct translation of modern sociology into fiction, as Mersault was the translation of psychology. But Camus never parades technical flummery. There is none of the amateur psychoanalysis which makes much fiction tedious. The clinical insight goes beyond and by-passes argument. It hands us our own experience with the reasons which make it what it is. And it contains, in Tarrou's words, the remedy for the Plague. 'All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims,

and it's up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences' — whether they offer us democracy, peace, freedom, national greatness, justice, righteous punishment, or anything else as cover for the filth of their sores and the stink of their murders. In a community which is devoting itself to the making of atomic bombs — or the building of concentration camps — that is not an easy message, but it is one whose health and soundness make us aware of our sores. 'Each one of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth, is free from it. We must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection upon him'. The individual is responsible, and the remedy lies in his responsible disobedience.

Very few readers who share anything of the insight of Tarrou will read this novel without being as profoundly influenced by it as Shelley was by *Political Justice*. Unesco should have it printed and send it free to every human being in Europe. It reminds us that both we and the people they want us to butcher are human beings.

***Readers News*, c. 1949**

Twenty One

Criminals and Society

In the last two months there have appeared two important studies in the psychology and treatment of delinquency, under almost identical titles. Sir Norwood East's *Society and the Criminals* and Dr Paul Reiwald's *Society and Its Criminals*, which might almost have been written as replies to one another, or as differing contributions to criminology and penology, but their chief interest to non-specialists is the sharpness with which they bring out the division which exists between the two main currents in modern scientific thought and work on the subject of delinquency.

Sir Norwood East's book, under the imprint of the Stationery Office and with a preface by the Chairman of the Prison Commission, is an

exposition and an apology — it presents the furthest point which progressive opinion within the prison administration has reached in its attitude towards the criminal and his treatment. East himself occupies a unique position — he has a most extensive experience of the criminal in practice and in administration, he has in his time been criticised with equal force by traditionalists who regard him as revolutionary, and by revolutionaries who regard him as a traditionalist. Reiwald's position is different — originally a barrister, he turned to psychology and sociology in their forensic aspects, and holds the readership in criminology at Geneva.

Apart from its medical interest as the product of very long and careful study, East's book should enable critics of the official system of crime prevention and criminal justice to understand what is in the mind of the intelligent scientist within that system. We very readily underestimate the problem presented to the official and the psychiatrist upon whose doorstep convicted persons are deposited, not in the hypothetical future, but *under the present social system and within the environment of modern urban society*. An accurate gauge of the underlying attitude can be found in East's theory of punishment, in which reformative, deterrent and retributive elements are recognised, in that order. Emphasis is laid on the over-riding claim of the security of society, though the rehabilitation of the offender is, subject to that claim, the concern of the penal psychiatrist as physician. Methods of punishment, and social customs which promote patterns of conduct to the status of crimes, are fit subjects for psychiatric study and analysis in terms of factual observation: the emphasis is on the gradual consolidation of progress on a basis of established fact — 'wildcat' theories, the application of untried speculations, and all 'armchair' penology by those who never saw a delinquent except in a film are equally condemned. It is difficult not to feel respect for this approach, though much of that respect belongs rather to East himself, as a scientist of manifest integrity and learning, rather than to the penal system. In certain passages, however, notably in his defence of retribution and the religious elements in the theory of punishment, and above all in his references to the atmosphere of prison with its 'bland and easily assimilated diet', the reader's confidence is badly shaken. This is particularly the case where East, in criticising the unpractical suggestions of non-administrative psychiatrists, defines sentimentality as the pursuit of a policy for the emotional satisfaction which it gives, rather than for its fitness to achieve an ostensible purpose. It is precisely this type of sentimentality which manifests itself in the whole conception of

retributive punishment, of coercion as a means of modifying conduct, and of law in coercive societies. So long as the premises of traditional law, and its professed intentions, are accepted at their face value, East's approach is adequate. We can recognise him as one of the men who has done most for the decent and sensible treatment of the criminal in our own time. But it is precisely the premises and intentions which are in question.

At the beginning of his study, Reiwald describes how, during his own career at the Bar, he was disturbed by the emotional, if not orgiastic, atmosphere attending the trial and punishment of some types of crime. For East, and for the 'mask' of society, crimes differ in gravity, but all menace society. For Reiwald, crimes are quite manifestly divisible into 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' — those which excite us emotionally and those which do not. It is not enough to regard law as a rational attempt to remove crime. Neither in the historical process which has given us our modern system of punishment, nor in the minds of judges is this the case. In the matter of sexual offences, East himself recognises this divergence between pretension and reality. Reiwald goes further. Common experience and the whole body of crime literature makes it perfectly obvious that the criminal is the focus of emotional forces whose intensity depends on the type of crime — murder is of all offences the most satisfactory; embezzlement carries no such emotional load. Reiwald goes on to suggest that so long as this ambivalence has existed, the intention of the law and the law-abiding public to suppress crime has always been secondary to the emotional need that criminals should continue to exist, and to discharge by their punishment the emotional potentials built up in those who conform outwardly to law. The case is relentlessly built up through psychology, anthropology and primitive religion, through the acknowledged desire of many criminals to accept punishment, especially death, which leads to the notorious 'deliberate mistake' in many patterns of aggressive crime: through the psychopathic attitude of many otherwise distinguished criminologists, who talk of an 'army of criminals' menacing society, in contradiction of all statistical evidence; through the identity of execution with human sacrifice (until a century or so ago, the criminal was partly disguised as an animal on his journey to the gallows). While for East law and punishment can be regarded rationally, for Reiwald, and for a growing body of sociological opinion, they are the chief surviving example of a primitive religious ceremony. The evidence is too strong to be dismissed as speculation, and it cuts whole ground from under the feet of conservative penology.

It seems fairly clear that the attitude which Reiwald exemplifies must ultimately prevail. It carries far wider social implications than the author himself seems to recognise, since it automatically commits science to further and further study, not only of delinquents in court or in prison, but of delinquents in society and office. Reiwald has no clear theory of social organisation to supplement his concrete suggestions, but such a theory is increasingly provided by sociology in other fields, and it is, in orientation, increasingly anarchist. The final argument which must appeal to the conservative as well as the reforming penologist is that of results. An increasing body of evidence from every quarter supports the view that sociality can and does rehabilitate delinquents, while coercion does not. In Reiwald's words: 'There is today an unequivocal answer to the question, what can be substituted for aggression in criminal law? — Non-violence and self-government as means of education.' In modern social medicine we have yet another point at which revolution is being effected not by agitators waving posters but by the application of the normal methods of research to society.

***Freedom*, 24th December 1949**

Twenty Two

Psychopaths in Power

Eugen Kogon, born in Munich in 1903, is an economist and sociologist who served several years' imprisonment in the worst Nazi camps. In this book, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, he gives a documented account of the concentration camp system.

When the initial reports of conditions in these places were published in England, many readers, including this reviewer, were inclined to treat the worst excesses with incredulity. A good many of the reported activities of the SS were of a kind which had already figured largely in belligerent propaganda of both wars. Reported atrocities are commonly recognisable

as psychopathic fantasy — our error in doubting them lay chiefly in a failure to recognise how far the Nazi régime was, in fact, a psychopathic manifestation. The psychopath who invents atrocities is undoubtedly liable, in certain circumstances, to enact them, and this, under Nazism, was precisely what happened. Documentation of these horrors had an important function in removing our scepticism about the limits to which group delinquency could go: the facts being established, the reports and documents have a secondary function in preventive medicine.

If I seem to be taking Kogon's testimony calmly (and it is harrowing enough in all conscience) it is because the most important feature of all this beastliness today is the need to ensure that it does not recur. Almost everything which took place in the camps, and which reached the limit of human cruelty, is a commonplace in psychiatry *as fantasy*. In our own society it may break into reality as individual action, but no individual possesses the opportunity to enact it undisguised on a larger scale. The peculiar danger which concerns social medicine (and anarchism) is the tendency of societies to provide such opportunity through the structure of government, at a time when, by their pattern of life, they encourage the growth of large numbers of individuals abnormal enough to avail themselves of it.

What Kogon's testimony does show, to a remarkable degree, is that there is a distinction between most current examples of sadistic behaviour within civilised societies and the sadistic behaviour of Nazism. Brutality in prisons and by executive authorities recurs in all contemporary cultures to a greater or lesser degree, but Nazi Germany has been the first large culture to be deranged bodily to the point at which the sadistic pattern is primary and overrides all practical and political considerations. It has been stated that Soviet Russia has an even larger number of political prisoners than Hitler had, but an examination of their evidence, where it is available, shows definite points of difference between the Nazi and the communist attitude. In this respect, the communist treatment of prisoners is an exaggeration of our own, or, more accurately, it represents the type or attitude which is apt to develop in any culture which has a repressive and power-centred form of government unrestrained by public opinion or by any contrary stream of tradition. The mental forces at work may be the same as in Germany, but in no other culture within recent record has the process of coincidence between individual sadistic fantasy and social acceptance gone so far as in Nazism.

The German camps originally served clear-cut purposes of intimidation and repression, but it is clear from Kogon's evidence that the élite created to man them very soon got wholly out of control. The final picture

is a particularly terrifying one, of a repressive and militaristic government relying for the maintenance of its power not upon a limited number of executioners, as in many previous and present tyrannies, but upon an executioner-élite, serving no function but the refinement of punishment, and numbering over 940,000 men out of a population of about 73,000,000. We can look at it in two ways — on the one hand, it may be true that the peculiar set of circumstances which brought this about in Germany are unlikely to recur. On the other, it is unquestionable that the growing reliance of coercive societies on enforcement executives makes for a repetition of the pattern which the SS exemplified.

It is precisely upon the individual character-structure of the SS that we need information. Kogon's section on their psychology is unfortunately not helpful about this. Some at least were normal personalities gradually acclimatised to brutality — their delinquent behaviour came from a culturally-determined obedience to orders. Others were drawn from all the known psychopathies. Particularly informative on the mental state of the policy-makers is the section on scientific research in the camps. In hundreds of human experiments, not one single fact worth mentioning was obtained. Huge energy was devoted to the search for a quick means of sterilisation — even a research on exposure to cold, which would have been within the bounds of reasonable utility to men who treated their subject with far less humanity than experimental animals, ended by assessing the results of sexual intercourse in reviving the frozen.

The obverse and equally important study, that of the psychology of the imprisoned, is matter for a longer review than can be written here. Kogon provides new facts from his own experience. Seen as a whole, the book is an important and probably a reliable contribution to the literature of concentration camps: it lacks the immediacy and economy of Ella Lingens-Reiner's classic, *Prisoners of Fear*, but it has its own value. If we wonder whether our own society contains some or any of the seeds which germinated in the SS, we may perhaps reflect that this book, like any description of sexually-determined cruelty, will be bound to have a definite audience as pornography. Buchenwald undoubtedly exists, potentially, in the unconscious of a great many individuals who would pass muster as normal. Given certain social conditions, it can re-emerge as cold fact, whether as the open sexual violence of the SS, or as the censored equivalent which produced the atomic bomb and unlimited warfare.

***Freedom*, 14th October 1950**

TWENTY THREE

The Social Psychiatry of Communism

It is some time now since Marie-Louise Berneri published her *Workers in Stalin's Russia*. Since the early conflict between anarchists and Bolsheviks before and after the October Revolution, reflected in Stalin's own polemic against anarchist opponents, the primary conflict in revolutionary thought has been between the libertarian and the absolutist conceptions of the revolutionary objective — it is still the main problem of our time, though its form has changed with the progress of social science. During that time, libertarian revolutionaries who, apart from a very brief experiment in Spain, have never found themselves in a position to influence history except by precept, have been developing their theoretical position — often, like ourselves, within a social democracy where theoretical activities at least were tolerated. The absolutist opposition, on the other hand, has secured a practical control of over a sixth of the earth's population, and looks like acquiring more. The Soviet Union, in particular, has become a fact whose extent we tend to overlook.

As long as the conflict between these two views of revolution was limited to the debates of the Bakuninians and Bolsheviks of 1917, it was good enough to conduct it at the level of the nineteenth-century political actionism. It seems to me that today we devote too much time to the refutation of political communism, and far too little to the sociology of communist societies as culture-patterns. Marxism-Leninism has modified its theories, if at all, by experience and expediency: has been highly unreceptive to 'bourgeois' social sciences, but it is social psychiatry and comparative anthropology which now provide the main ground for our position. We have recently spent much time in discussing how these sciences bear on delinquency and on power: in general we have emphasised the need for understanding the mechanism of these forces by straightforward experimental and observational analysis, and treating them by scientific psychiatry. We have not, I think, made any such attempt to deal with the problems presented by modern communist societies. Communism is no longer an academic theory, but a culture-pattern, covering millions of individuals of different racial backgrounds, but apparently almost as uniform as the overall culture pattern of the

British peoples or the USA. Non-communist political movements at the moment, having no cause whatever to love the communists, tend to be content with the statement 'Stalin is a tyrant: life in Russia is hell for all concerned', leaving the matter at that, apart from the selection of examples of communist duplicity. This bare expression of disapproval takes one no further in the direction of modifying, or even co-existing with, the largest single overall culture-pattern of the present day — yet modifying culture-patterns by minority action is the activity which we understand by 'revolution', or by social psychiatry, and to which I think we are committed. We are hardly likely to modify a culture-pattern of this extent by romanticised disapproval — the days when it was possible to argue that one could alter Russia by assassinating the Tsar have been permanently ended by the experimental study of society. There remains only the psychiatric approach, and treatment, as in limited problems of individual adjustment, involves far more comprehensive hard work than we have yet put in.

It was a note in *Freedom* to the effect that someone had commented on the lack of neurosis in the Soviet Union which set me thinking on these lines. I went into the literature on this subject for my own information: it seems very likely that the statement is true. There is nothing sociologically unlikely about that — stable culture-patterns which contain a sufficient number of social integrative factors do in fact tend to reduce individual neurosis even if they are coercive. This observation is highly important as an index of what we are up against. Where a society and an ideology co-exist, it is the society which matters from the viewpoint of stability. At the present moment for a great many anarchists, together with the more frightened European statesmen, 'Red Fascism' has become a slogan. It is one which needs examining a good deal further. We must at all costs be accurate observers of societies. If fascism is anything more tangible than a name for systems we dislike, it is bad sociology to apply it indiscriminately to all cultures in which coercive elements and state centralisation exist — one might as well suggest that Aztec and Hindu cultures are identical on the ground that both practised polytheism.

Fascism had a clear-cut meaning as applied to the social pattern of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Both of these were classical power-centred societies, deriving their whole and only driving force from the projection of individual aggression. Its main public stereotypes were racialism, aggressive war, the Divine Leader identified with the prohibitive and hated, but also feared and revered, father, the depreciation of women, and the use of realised sadistic fantasies, including castration,

against unbelievers. To the sociologist this is a coherent pattern, but it is also one quite unlike the pattern presented by Soviet Russia as a culture. Fascism is a term which should be limited to cultures showing most or all of these attributes, where the orientation is almost wholly towards death, and where, as in Hitler's Germany, there is no inherent dynamic apart from individual aggression. On this one could base two important inferences — that fascism could absorb stable societies only by force, and that it was bound ultimately to disintegrate, however much mischief it might do meanwhile.

If one tabulates the chief drives and stereotypes in Russian culture, as opposed to communist theory, or even the main drives and stereotypes of communist theory itself, the picture is entirely different. Modern Russia is a centralised political system which has incorporated several local cultures, ranging from Orthodox urban through feudal to Moslem nomadic. It is based on a strongly absolutist state and a narrow but actively proselytising ideology. Its main stereotypes are civic duty, production, defence of the ideology, and extension of human control over environment. It has also had a strong feminist and anti-racialist tone, but has tended to replace cultural or genetic racialism by a species of class-racialism, which projected aggression against kulaks instead of Jews. (Anarchist thought has often shown a similar tendency.) Its sexual orientation was at one time liberal and experimental, but has become considerably more similar to that of English Puritanism, which it now very closely parallels in many other particulars. (The analogy between the Marxist and Cromwellian revolutions is highly instructive, and is almost the only valid social parallel in existence.) Whereas fascism followed a classical pattern, Soviet society is far more unusual, combining absolutist political organisation with the types of stereotypes which usually exist in 'productive' cultures, i.e. those whose main concern is with the food supply, and whose severest disapproval falls on those who endanger it.

For reasons made clear by Freud, the single or collective 'father-figure' is an important index in most cultures. The father-figure which exists in Russian culture differs entirely from the father-figure of Hitler. His existence is partly political, where he has comparable attributes of omniscience, but here he is chiefly a carry-over from a long-standing Russian and Christian tradition. Father-stereotypy dies so hard in most societies that the father-figure of a successful English communist culture on this model would be likely to occupy the place of the King rather than that of the Tsar. If one tabulates the attributes of this figure in the literature of Nazism and of Soviet Russia, the difference becomes obvious.

Hitler is 'leader, warrior, avenger, superman, Jew-slayer', protector of the mother against rape. Stalin is leader, philosopher, prophet, scientist, victor in the Patriotic War, father of the people, patron of the arts. Although these are propagandist points, like all propaganda they are culturally determined. While still the father, he is emphatically closer to the defender and giver of gifts and instruction than the punisher and sexual rival of childhood. The Christian god has alternated throughout history between these two patterns. Nazism and Soviet Russia have stabilised very different aspects.

It is clearly necessary to stress the difference between the pattern of a culture and the political use which is made of this pattern by rulers. But it is the *cultural pattern which matters* in sociology, both for prediction of the future and for deliberate attempts to understand and modify the picture, since it limits the type of action which the rulers can undertake or impose. At first sight one tends to emphasise discrepancies between ideology and action — communism both exalts and coerces the workers — but the fact that no cultural group implements all its implicit standards is universal. 'Brotherhood' is no less a cultural stereotype in the USA because it co-exists with racialism, or public integrity in England, because it co-exists with the Zinoviev letter. A culture tends to absorb standards which are dinned into it as intensively as competition in American films or art, or social solidarity in Russia. Absolutist state machines are the least limited by such factors, but they are limited by them. Not even Stalin could impose American cultural and ideological patterns on the Soviet Union overnight, even if he employed the full weight of his authority to do so. Communism had, however, been able to impose a uniform culture-pattern on widely dissimilar societies by virtue of its dynamic elements. One cannot imagine Hitlerism either wishing to incorporate, or succeeding in incorporating, groups as diverse as the Greater Russians, the Manchurians, and the Tajiks, even though these groups were already within the political orbit of Tsarism. The important feature of this is that only assimilative cultures of this kind stand any chance of setting up long-term widespread civilisations such as those created by past imperial nations. The combination of sociality with absolutism has far greater powers of this kind than any group which lacks primary social cohesion — our own, and American society, do at the present time lack that type of cohesion: the individual in them is far more isolated. For this reason there is no sociological ground for thinking that in their present form they can compete effectively with communism except in societies such as those of Western Europe which are already closely similar to themselves. In Asia and Africa, they have very little assimilative power,

and in view of the geographical extent of communism today it is historically and sociologically far more likely that any attempts which we may make to alter the pattern of society will have to be made against an ideological setting comparable to that of the Soviet Union than in one of the social-democratic type.

This is a point which should very seriously influence our thinking. We know the practical difficulties of modifying any type of absolutism by individual initiative. It also raises the question how far a compact culture like that of Great Britain could influence the development of a different and far larger cultural system if it became a vehicle, either in practice or in ideas, of the type of society we have been attempting to encourage. In the past self-contained, creative cultures like that of Greece have had disproportionately wide influence within widespread, assimilative cultures like that of Rome. Island groups of this kind tend to resist assimilation if they can escape extermination. At the present moment, there is a considerably better chance of incorporating some elements of libertarian practice, and more elements of libertarian theory, into English culture than into any other of comparable size and coherence, a fact which places a very heavy responsibility on English libertarians. American culture is both too unwieldy and too disorientated at the individual level to exert such an influence, except through individuals. The recurrence of competitive and sadistic symbols in its literature and the line of its political development suggests that it runs the risk of falling into a state of endemic neurosis comparable with that of Nazi Germany.

Since the revolution a stream of visitors to Russia have come back depicting the communist culture-pattern as either heaven or hell. These views are not incompatible or necessarily propagandist. It is apt to appear as heaven to those individuals who feel more need for social cohesion than for intellectual liberty, and as hell to those who prefer individual freedom to sociality. The objective of anarchism has been, and still is, by definition to secure both. In trying to do this we are undertaking a piece of sociological engineering far more complicated than that undertaken by Lenin, who secured one without regard to the other. Attempts to do this at a crudely political level, or without extensive research and observation, are like trying to build a hydro-electric scheme with flint implements.

The aim of Lenin was, though he would not have phrased it in this form, to turn communism from a political ideology into part of the culture-pattern of Russia, and this he succeeded in doing. Both Soviet Russia and some at least of the other cultures she has influenced are now at least as stable in their new form as Roman Imperial society. As culture-

patterns they contain a bewildering mixture of positive and negative elements: centralisation and decentralisation, co-operation and coercion, repression and realisation, considerably more complex than in any single unidirectional pattern such as Nazism. Like other cultures, they are going to be determined almost wholly by the type of character-structure they produce in individuals, and this in turn will depend on everything from ideology and propaganda to patterns of infant feeding behaviour. Some of these forces are under control by the administration — others, especially in a system which discounts much recent work on character-formation, by forces which the administration does not recognise.

Clearly, however, the problems raised by such cultures are not radically different from those in our own — the tendency of certain individuals to think in terms of coercion as a result of forces in their own personalities, and to write power-centred standards into the cultures they control. This we have always recognised as the fundamental historical problem for psychiatry. What I have said is not an apology for communism, but an attempt to show that our ideas here as elsewhere have got to be formulated in terms of observational science, rather than of political propaganda, if we hope to affect the new direction in which these cultures grow. In summary, communism is now a working and stable culture-pattern in Russia: it may easily adjust itself to other societies and assimilate them. If this occurs, history suggests that it is unlikely to be seriously modified by any sort of revolutionary agitation, but might well be modified by psychiatrically-directed action, or by incorporating other and equally stable cultures. As libertarians working in one such stable culture, where we have at present considerable scope for spreading our ideas, we have a peculiar responsibility to realise what we are about. In view of the fact that some elements of sociality and spontaneity are essential for the continuance of any culture, even one which is partly coercive, psychiatry always works with, not against, 'human nature', but it has a far tougher assignment in dealing with the complex authoritarian cultures of our time, especially when they do in fact contain enough socially valid attitudes to ensure that individuals derive positive strength and satisfaction from association with them, than can be discharged in terms of political action at any level. From now on, whether we like it or not, in attempting to develop the implications of social science we are research workers, facing the risks and problems of social public health. In other words, it is as useless to begin our assessment of communism by dismissing it as 'Red Fascism' and assuming that all individuals in its orbit are yearning to terminate it, as to adopt the attitude

of Victorian missionaries among the heathen. Unless we prefer the emotive satisfaction of being political agitators on the nineteenth-century activist model, we have got to become social anthropologists, on a strictly therapeutic and objective basis. We are dealing not with 'Communism' but with communists.

In Margaret Mead's words, anthropology consists not only in an observation of cultures which includes an active emotional perception of how their members live and think, but in the establishment of a positive relationship. The political dissident in a society has a positive relationship to that society, as we have in our own, but it is a resented and therefore a limited one. Perhaps the best example of a minority setting out to change a culture in which it has to live, without accepting a limited relationship of this kind, has been the Quaker movement. Social psychiatry of the type which I think is our obligation depends increasingly upon a group relationship with other individuals who do not share our convictions, but who know themselves to be accepted as individuals, and anarchism, as an individualistic view of society, is today the only non-religious ideology capable of doing this. In a culture like our own, where group action and propaganda are traditionally tolerated up to a point, the problem is not so acute, but such cultures are becoming less common. The adjustment with an intolerant society which one intends to modify is one of the hardest there is — revolutionaries in the past have attempted every approach from fellow-travelling to deliberate martyrdom with varying results: most of us would reject any compromise which involved the suppression of our own views of what is right, yet, for psychiatry, a personal relationship with the opposition is something we must have.

I think that this adjustment is something what has so far been peculiar to medicine, and doctors are in a unique position to make it: for us, at least, there is no ground to think that General Franco is less accessible to psychiatry than any other delinquent, provided we can get at him — we have long since become so used to dealing personally and without anger with individuals whose conduct seems to us foolish, wicked or psychopathic that no patient, however obnoxious, seems quite inaccessible. I am biased by this traditional approach — medicine is used to enter into the thoughts and even the friendship of delinquents and psychopaths without sacrificing its own orientation. Sometimes the delinquents knock us on the head. But in the problem of modifying intolerant societies, I think it is an attitude from which all who have that aim must begin to learn.

***Freedom*, 25th November and 9th December 1950**

TWENTY FOUR

The Russian Attitude to Child Sexuality

In view of the use which Western sociologists have made of attitudes toward infantile and child sexuality as a cultural index, this translation* is of great interest both to anarchists and to psychological readers in general. It comes from a textbook for Soviet kindergarten and child-health workers which has run through four editions, and as such it probably represents a fair picture of the approach to infant sexuality which Soviet psychology is trying to inculcate. The pre-school institution (nursery, kindergarten, etc.) seems to be widely developed in Russia, and probably plays a very considerable part in the character-formation of both urban and rural children, and its principles have been the subject of several major controversies in Soviet journals.

Arkin's paper begins with the rather staggering statement, to Western ears, that 'questions of sexual development, hygiene and education find little reflection in scientific literature' (from the point of view of shelf space, English psychiatrists would be relieved if they could share this view). The object of the chapter is to provide kindergarten workers with an objective picture of infantile sexuality and of the attitude towards it which they ought to adopt. Much of the existing literature, Arkin says, is misleading or downright harmful — a good deal of it regards all sexual manifestations in infancy as pathological: Metchnikov, on the other hand, long since pointed out that sexual feeling normally arises long before physical puberty, and Arkin, from his own experience, concludes that the vast majority of its manifestations fall well within normality. The widespread scientific and public idea of correlation between infant masturbation and ill-health is quite unfounded, though it seems to go with daydreaming (the under-six age group rather than the infant is clearly meant) and 'cruelty of character is much more frequently observed in boys who show sexuality than in girls'. Other manifestations include

*_The Sexual Problem in Early Childhood_ (extract from _The Pre-School Age Group_ by E.A. Arkin, 5th edition, Uchpedgiz, Moscow, 1948. English translation published by SCR, 1950).

an excessive desire for cuddling and fondling, curiosity over sex, exhibitionism and drawings with sexual content.

The interpretation of these phenomena is more difficult — Freud's 'narrowly biological and arbitrary' view, and especially the idea of the primacy of sexual drives and of amnesia due to inhibition are condemned, though the Oedipus concept is not mentioned as such. (Freud himself is partly to blame for the construction put on his theory by Arkin, as by a great many English workers, through his use of the word 'sexual' in relation to drives which eventually become specifically sexual.) 'The fate of sexuality proceeds in close dependence on the path of development of the whole personality' and psychotherapy in childhood should treat the whole and not the part.

'The facts say that in the early years of life, as well as in the others, sexuality is not in itself pathological' — the task of the child hygienist is therefore to distinguish between manifestations which can be safely left alone and those which need to be discouraged, such as 'lewdness and coarseness', which can very easily spread by imitation. The view that masturbation leads to exhaustion and mental illness is entirely without foundation, but the author finds it 'impossible to align oneself with those who are ready to look on it as a harmless act'. The dangers are not physical but social — masturbation is a bad thing because it gives rise to 'spiritual conflict' with the sexual attitudes of others, since 'children closely conceal their sexual activities and curiosity from adults'. It is this conflict which leads to mischief. The remedy is to fill the child's entire time with socially-useful activities and strengthen his self-confidence. Children who masturbate should certainly not be segregated or 'branded with infamy' unless they show aggressive behaviour marked by 'coarse, shameful lewdness'. Co-education for older children, and the practice in some kindergartens of the teacher bathing with the children, if they are over six years old should be avoided (most English child psychologists would feel that the child's curiosity about the anatomy of the other sex should have been met before this age). On the other hand, the school cannot provide a proper background without the assistance of the family. 'Socialist culture has not yet dislodged from the life of adults such scenes and words as give rise to vulgar behaviour' — it is all-important, moreover, to avoid linking sexuality with fear. Under no circumstances should corporal punishment, 'one of the characteristic features of bourgeois pedagogics', fright, humiliation or threats be used to counter undesirable sexual manifestations. Corporal punishment in particular is 'in irreconcilable contradiction with the fundamental principles of

communist education'. As a general summary of the argument, 'personal impressions gathered in observing children who later became famous ... persuade one to this conviction, that profundity and complexity of sexual experience manifested in early years testify to a more complex organisation and a faster tempo of general spiritual development'.

On sex education, Arkin stresses its importance to the teacher and parent far more than to the child — lies should never be told, but it is not necessary to go into details for the benefit of 'little children'. Of six dated references in the bibliography, none is later than 1926.

To the non-communist observer, the most striking feature of this account is its familiarity: roughly speaking, this is where most educationalists stood in 1920, and Arkin himself seems to be having to contend with public attitudes and public ignorance not unlike those in Western countries. The least encouraging part of the discourse, from the sociological point of view, is its extremely muddled, or at least inexplicit, view of the factors which influence character-formation, all of which are stated in general idealistic terms, and the absence of any discussion of the normally observable phases through which infantile sexuality develops. This lack of a coherent theory of psychodynamics seems to be general in communist psychiatry. Arkin's position is hardly authoritarian — he does at least go out of his way to insist on the need to combat any tendency towards cruelty, by or to the child — but to anarchist readers it is certainly negative, and, to borrow Arkin's own term, 'bourgeois': it makes no attempt to employ sexuality as a source of individual spontaneity, and repudiates the idea that early sexual attitudes have any key position in the formation of character. How far Arkin's ideas are actually carried out in practice it is hard to judge, though they have probably been widely read by would-be kindergarten teachers in training: in view of the other emphases in Soviet education, especially in political and social indoctrination, one cannot predict what sort of individuals the schools are likely to turn out, and it is precisely on this that the future course of Russia is likely to depend. The religious emphasis in England is largely replaced by a rather romanticised 'Socialist modesty' and there is an unstated assumption that sexual enjoyment, being a purely individual activity unless it is reproductive, is morally inferior to corporate endeavour — a view which is in line with the Marxist view of civilisation in terms of labour. Most striking of all is the virtual isolation, whether by accident or design, of Russian educationalists from the recent work done by their 'bourgeois' colleagues, and the likeness between the outcomes of ideology in Russia and 'common-sense' as a psychological

critique in England. Readers who wish to examine the Soviet attitude to child development in the light of their own opinions would do well to read the original pamphlet.

Freedom, 17th February 1951

TWENTY FIVE

What Can We Do to Stop Them?

I do not think that I need stress tonight the possibilities of the situation we find ourselves in. I believe that your own experience, which may have brought you here tonight, has been the same as mine. Wherever I go, in scores of letters from people I do not know and have never met, in conversation with friends and in talk I overhear as I go about, one question is being asked — what can we do to stop them? Not 'what can the government, or UNO, or the Church, or my political party, do?' but what can we do, we individuals?

Our political leaders are perpetually exhorting the public to see the issues more clearly, through their spectacles, to face them more squarely, along the lines which they suggest. I submit to you that it is to the great credit of the ordinary people of this country — and, if we can judge from recent Gallup polls, to the credit of the ordinary people of America — that they do recognise the issues, and recognise them in spite of the two opposing streams of propaganda which depict the West or the Soviet Union as either angel of light or devil incarnate. I submit to you that the public here, and I firmly believe the public in all countries, do increasingly, and in spite of the din of propaganda to which they are being subjected, see the facts as they are. Instead of an opposition of blameless right and unmitigated wrong, of freedom and tyranny, whichever way round you care to put it, they see a couple of groups of frightened politicians, culturally incapable of understanding one another, ready to sacrifice anyone and anything except their own inerrancy, blundering

closer and closer to something which will destroy all of us. The public are not communists, they are not, in its developed sense, pacifists — if they have a conscientious objection it is to laying down their lives fruitlessly at the instance of lunatics.

Because the position is abundantly clear. If anyone was in doubt, the Korean war should have dispelled that doubt. I think that perhaps the British government is just beginning to realise the effect which that war, its streams of refugees, its massacres of villagers with petrol bombs, its empty pretensions of liberation and its filthy reality, is having on public opinion. It is not a matter of objecting to war as an abstraction in ethics. It is not even a matter of preferring communism to war. It is simply the perception that whoever else can survive another war, this country cannot. It is an indefensible aircraft carrier allied to a wholly irresponsible power, a power which is perfectly prepared to re-enact not only the horrors of Korea or the horrors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but to expand them to equal the horrors of the German extermination of Jewry, if, in General Eisenhower's very frank words, that will bring them military advantage. War in the past may have been an instrument of policy under which, although the people invariably lost, the leaders who promoted it stood to win. Revolutionaries and reformers could criticise the selfishness of a ruling class which hoped to profit from other people's suffering. Not even that is true today. The atomic bomb and the frenzy of contemporary politics do not reflect any such intelligible plan. They are the work not of a cynical policy, but of mental patients.

For this country, war is not an alternative — it is simply the end of our existence. According to the American civil defence chiefs, we shall soon get used to atomic bombs. Well, it has rightly been said that defeat would mean the end of America, but war would mean the end of Europe. War between America and Russia could not be won by either side. It would involve the overrunning of Europe, and probably Britain, by the Red Army, followed by its systematic devastation by the Americans. It would end in a compromise of exhaustion between two embittered tyrannies. We should see Korea re-enacted in Europe, we should see the retaliatory butchery of the population of Russia. If there were the smallest moral justification for throwing away our lives in this way, if anything whatever, except worse misery, could come from it, many of us would feel that we should sacrifice ourselves to resist tyranny, but every normal person will draw the line at sacrificing others, millions of others, by burns, torture, starvation and radiation sickness. It is not cowardice, but precisely the moral bankruptcy of the whole so-called anti-communist

campaign, which I believe the public recognises, and from which it revolts. The war against Germany showed that in what they believe a good cause the most unlikely people are willing to die for their opinions, but they are not willing to die for a blunder, a swindle or a piece of lunacy.

Let there be no mistake about it. The people who are most certain of Russia's warlike intentions are not enemies of tyranny. They did not stop Syngman Rhee's executions, or deplore Chiang's police state. They have not scrupled to collect and uphold a long series of discreditable tyrannies. We should not enter a war against China, or against Russia, as the allies of the liberation, but as the dupes of the bloody-minded old men who hate the achievements of communism far more than its vices, who by their folly have provoked and aggravated its intransigence, and who are now attempting to preserve world peace by the one measure calculated to turn that intransigence into open war, the re-armament of Germany and the release of the Nazi war leaders. In such a coalition our allies are not the oppressed peoples but Franco, Senator McCarthy, General MacArthur and the strategic bombing experts. And we have no right to pretend we do not know these people for what they are. They entered Korea, and we with them, as champions of independence. UNESCO prepared plans to make the country a model industrial democracy. I wonder today who would have the hardihood to suggest that any Korean would prefer such liberation to the worst that a local tyranny could do. They have razed every city and town, they have stood for the massacre of civilians, the execution of women and children, the torture of prisoners, the destruction, much of it spiteful and purposeless, of £400 million of property, and the production of about two million casualties and four million homeless. And it is this struggle, a very minor campaign of the world conflict, which is being extended to Europe. We are the next Korea, here, and unless we prevent it, soon.

Nobody, I think, will accuse me of being a communist. I hate the state as an institution, and I hate the arbitrariness and the narrowness of the Russian state. May I also say that like the vast majority of people in this country I have for the Russian people exactly the same friendship as I have for all peoples, increased rather than diminished by the sufferings they have undergone. I know that they want peace, as all peoples want it.

I could respect, though I could not support, anyone who thought that armed force might be used today to liberate someone, either from abuses in the East or from abuses in the West. That is not so today. War will liberate nobody from anything. If we co-operate with it in any shape or form, we shall place ourselves in the hands of men as devoted, through

their own fears, to the commission of unlimited and purposeless crime as were the Nazis — more unlimited and more purposeless.

What then can we do? Those of us who are on this platform have, from our various points of view, very often criticised parliamentary government. We are united in claiming that it affords no real safeguard against psychopaths in office. Now whatever you may feel about this theory, it must be plain to you that you may be able to change the policy of the government, but that you cannot do it by voting. Unless we are prepared to vote for the Communist Party, or for minority movements which have no hope of making their voice heard, we have no choice even between statements of policy, still less between the reality. If anyone is going to act today it must be ourselves, as individuals, not through any of the vehicles of political office but through out own exertions. The only barrier between this country and war is public opinion, public resistance, the certainty in the minds of those who wish to make war that they cannot make it with us. And above all things, I ask you to realise that they cannot go to war *without* us. We are not impotent. If those who today ask the question 'What can we do?' will realise that, we can prevent war.

Believing that we can answer their question. And this is my answer to it — strengthen your resolution, determine where you stand. By all means make your voice heard. Call your own neighbours together and discuss the thing with them. Join your voices, singly or in groups, to any of the organisations which are rendering anti-war feeling vocal and with which you feel you can agree. But having done all this, remember that at the last resort you have both the duty and the right to refuse, as an individual, to participate in war or the preparation of war.

You have no right to claim that you do not know what such a war would involve — over and above the mockery of innumerable conventions and pacts against genocide and massacre, from Geneva to Nuremburg, by which those who call you to fight still claim to be bound. You have every right to safeguard your own life and the lives of your innocent fellow men by the same refusal which we hoped for, in vain, from those Germans who supported Hitler. Sir Stafford Cripps said, in 1938, "the workers must make it clear beyond all doubt that they will not support the government in the policy it is now pursuing". Before those speeches are withdrawn as seditious I urge you to read them again.

Let me conclude with this. I believe that if every one of us resolves here and now, first, that our protest shall be heard, then he will not keep silence, and second that he will under no circumstances willingly take part in war or the preparation of war, I believe that we can succeed, and

that in that undertaking we will be acting together with, and in the interests of, the people of all countries. Let every one of us use the voice he has, and the conscience he has, and I believe that we can succeed.

Speech at public meeting organised by the London Anarchist Group, 28th March 1951, printed in *Freedom*, 14th April 1951

TWENTY SIX

Social Responsibility in Science and Art

There have been times in the history of art and of science when the individual worker's responsibility was not a pressing issue. Both, like any absorbing occupation, could provide a very real intellectual refuge. That is not true today, I think. In the first place, the pressure of ethical decisions upon all of us, all the time, is now intense and unavoidable, and that applies just as much to the postman, the shoemaker and the solicitor's clerk as it does to the artist or the scientist — any of them may at any time be called upon, under compulsion, to support or to carry out themselves actions which would have disgusted Ghengis Khan. Secondly, I believe that the artist and scientist have special responsibilities, in addition to their normal duty, of remaining human beings in whose eyes no other human being is quite deserving to be treated as vermin.

I am claiming for the artist and the scientist no kind of privilege or leadership which sets them above that responsibility. In fact the only pre-eminence they can claim is one which makes the need for conscious ethical choice more pressing and more inevitable than it is for others with other aptitudes.

The problems we all face are not new. It can be argued that the atom bomb poses no fundamentally different moral choice from that which

faced the Napoleonic conscript with his bayonet or the citizen during the Hundred Years' War, but the growth of our self-awareness, for which science and art are both responsible, has made a profound difference to our attitudes. We see ostensibly civilised cultures committing themselves to genocide as a weapon of war, we see the really fundamental human problems of continuing over-population and disease neglected in favour of psychopathic feuds — and most significantly we are put in the position, all of us, of choosing between enforced participation and active resistance without being able to trust, as our fathers did, to the idea of protest and progress through the usual political channels. Everything we sense as individuals, and very nearly everything we learn as social psychologists, makes it clear that any gesture of protest, any attempt to modify the course of events, must initially, if not throughout, be a personal one — a reassertion of our own responsibility towards other individuals.

Throughout very nearly the whole of Western culture, what is, in effect, the same problem of social ethics is uppermost in the minds of nearly everyone who is capable of articulate thought and expresses himself publicly. And when I say Western culture, I am referring not to any polemical conception of Western culture but to an entity which includes both Russia and America, and spills over into all those parts of Asia where the intellectual techniques of the West are established. This preoccupation with social ethics has led to widely diverse results — much of the appeal of Marxism, for example, seems to me to have lain in the attempt it has made to restate the issue of social responsibility. That particular restatement fails to satisfy me personally, and it fails, I think, to satisfy the majority of English artists and scientists, but the fact that Marxism does make an explicit demand on the intellectual for him to formulate and act upon definite beliefs about his responsibility to society, may turn out to have been its most important consequence; it is this sort of formulation European intellectuals are trying, I think, to reach at the present time — or, at least, I find them doing it in every country I visit, and every country where I have friends, whether the immediate problem takes the form of resistance to war or resistance to irrational political institutions. Of all intellectuals, moreover, I think the burden falls most heavily upon the artist and upon the scientist.

The reason it falls on those groups springs, I believe, from their function. I did not select art and science arbitrarily, to discuss their responsibilities, or even because I have an interest in both of them myself. Man has so far developed only two effective techniques for widening his grasp on external realities: the technique of communicating total

perception which we call art, and the technique of investigating objective experience which we call science, and these are complementary techniques. In the past, artists have often been content to discuss their responsibility in aesthetic terms, and scientists have taken, and still do take, the kind of view which rejects any direct concern with the application of their results — the usual argument has been, I think, that the scientist has only the ordinary responsibilities of a citizen, and that he has no right to make special claims on the ordering of society. Those attitudes, I submit, have broken down. They have broken down in the face of the experience we have had of Nazism, in the face of the atom bomb, and the advent of policy-determination by mass hysteria; most of all they have broken down, for the scientists, in the face of the realisation that the policies now being applied over large parts of the earth are the result not of purposive planning, or even of purposive malice, but of entirely irrelevant factors springing from personality-disorder, neurotic and aggressive compulsions, and even of mental disease.

The scientist has been under obligation, all along, to the promotion of human welfare without being very keenly aware of the exact scope of his obligation, and often without taking the trouble to express it to himself in words. Now he finds himself, often to his great alarm, being asked to put unlimited powers of genocide, coercion and destruction into the hands of limited groups of individuals, many of whom show themselves by all their public gestures quite unfit to control a sporting gun, let alone a vast military machine. In recent years many scientists saw, or thought they saw, the possibility of ridding themselves of this very heavy responsibility through the institution of collective security. I can testify to the effect which events in Korea have had on some of my colleagues who thought in this way. Having seen collective security in action, quite a number of them have come to the view that there is no compromise possible for them, short of personal and individual refusal to co-operate in destructive or psychopathic projects, however these may be rationalised. In the words of Professor Max Born: 'The only remedy seems to me to be a violent moral reaction against the misuse of science. Scientists should organise themselves with the aim to outlaw the prostitution of science'.

'Nobody, least of all myself, can lay down the law to contemporary science. But the confusion of mind there is real. Not long ago, there was held a very important congress on atomic energy; one session was devoted to social implications. At that session, a speaker who said that he felt scientists should do something to implement their personal

responsibility for the work they undertake, though he was not prepared to say exactly what, was very warmly congratulated on a courageous and provocative speech. The public, sensing this confusion of mind, has not been slow to express some fairly violent anti-scientific sentiments. The scientist has come to rank in news value and in penny dreadfuls with the spy and the international crook. That may sound a frivolous comment, but the kind of public attitude which underlies it has, I believe, begun to exercise a very real pressure and perhaps a very salutary one on scientific workers themselves.

The need to translate an amorphous sense of social obligation into practical action is being felt more and more. The profound shock caused by the atomic bomb certainly posed the question of personal responsibility for the project in which one engages in a very sharp and inescapable form, but the issue had been growing to a head in other fields — the psychiatrists, for example, who were forced to choose between the creation of good soldiers full of hatred for the enemy, and the restoration of balanced personalities, or, more recently, the prospect of the military uses of bacteriology.

Some individuals have been in no doubt where their obligation lay: one eminent American exponent of cybernetics, for example, flatly refused to provide information to the Guided Missiles Project on the ground that he could not accept responsibility for the use to be made of it, or the international Microbiological Congress which passed an unequivocal resolution condemning the preparation of bacteriological warfare as unethical. Such definite attitudes are not yet general, and they are equally strongly opposed by other scientists, but it does seem to me that there is growing up very widely a desire, almost a craving, for an agreed ethical position. Those who feel this desire are frequently unwilling to formulate such a position, and may doubt the possibility of formulating it. Yet workers in specifically military research are, I think, already acutely aware of a very slight fall in temperature around them when they mix with their colleagues. The development of a unified ethical voice in science is slow, but it seems to me that its development is inevitable.

It happens that the branch of science in which I was trained, medicine, is the only branch which not only has such a unified ethic, but has had it for almost 6,000 years. The idea of the human responsibility of the doctor has been present since medicine was indistinguishable from magic. For some, it has been a supernatural duty based on religion or philosophy, but I doubt if that was the true origin of the Hippocratic tradition. It seems more likely that it arose because men recognised that since

knowledge of poisons and more-or-less dangerous and powerful remedies was needed for the struggle with disease, some safeguard was necessary to place the possessors of this hazardous proficiency in a special category, a category which made them responsible to humanity in general. When we destroyed the data obtained by human experiments in the Nazi concentration camps, we were reasserting that tradition. Our own age is the first since early European history in which that tradition has been seriously challenged, and even today a government is going to think twice before it calls a medical psychologist to assist in spreading hatred, or a medical bacteriologist to assist in spreading disease. It knows it runs the risk of meeting a refusal which would have the support of very nearly the whole of medical opinion throughout the world. Non-medical science has grown up without that tradition.

Leonardo might suppress his submarine, but most scientific workers, even the most far-sighted, have felt no uniform, corporate pressure from their tradition to act in this way — if they did, the decision was an individual one. Many felt that by stepping outside the normal processes of politics and citizenship and withholding their support from a particular course of action they were taking the law into their own hands. Today, we have only just ceased executing Germans for failing, in such a situation, to take the law into their own hands. It may perhaps be our recent experience of totalitarianism which will be the decisive factor in making the acceptance of personal responsibility general in science. Another and a more important force is the growth of a science of human behaviour. It is becoming clearer and clearer, through the work of social psychologists and psychopathologists, that if I make an atom bomb and entrust it to a political authority its use or non-use will not depend in any real sense upon threats from without, upon the moral will of the people, or upon any coherent argument or object, but upon quite irrelevant factors in the culture which possesses it and in the childhood upbringing and resultant personality of those who happen to hold office.

I do not think I need stress the unique position of the scientist in facing these problems. If he is prepared to formulate a humanistic ethic and stick to it, he can neither be replaced nor, in the last resort, coerced — it is possible for a state to command a certain amount of purely technical acquiescence but fundamental research and original investigation, on which the whole of technology now depends, can be produced only by willing and enthusiastic workers, not by conscript labour in a science factory. It must be quite clear that if science is prepared to take a really strong line about co-operation with anti-human and destructive policies

it can be both effective and decisive. It can, moreover, rally very wide popular support, as the doctor relies on the sanction of world opinion when he asserts his professional neutrality in the care of the wounded. It is possible that in movements such as the American Society for Social Responsibility in Science, to which Professor Einstein has recently given his support, and in debates such as those conducted through the Atomic Scientists' Association, we may be seeing the emergence of such a unified ethical attitude.

In the situation in which our own country finds itself, it will certainly be argued that unless the scientist is willing to co-operate with what is termed, rather hopefully, defence, even if that means the preparation of highly destructive weapons, he must take the responsibility for the destruction of all scientific liberty by one or another totalitarianism. The same argument would apply to medicine, and I doubt if most doctors would be prepared to abandon their tradition because of that risk. In fact, the effect of atomic and other preparations on the growth of science and the liberty of information, as well as the psychological effects of the weapons on their users, are proving not much less serious than those of the forces they are supposed to counter. Even if that were not so, I would remind you that I am talking about a policy for scientific ethics, not scientific expediency. There are some policies, such as Hitler's gas chambers, or war based on genocide, to which I believe we can only reply: 'Here stand I, I can do no other'. It is the point at which this stand must be made which is the constant anxiety of a great many scientific workers today.

Compared with the immediate practical responsibility of the scientist, the responsibility of the artist must seem puny. The decision which faces him is not, I think, one of practical action: of course he will try to throw his weight into the scale, and that weight, if he is a writer or even a painter of genius, may have its effect. For the novelist — in our society the only artist who has a mass audience and at the same time effective economic control of the means of addressing it — the hope of some decisive influence is a reasonable one. For him, since he takes of all artists what is probably the largest portion of his culture as material, there is no more escape from the necessity for treating the content of his work seriously than there is for the social psychologist he is coming so closely to resemble. The dichotomy which people have tried to establish between artistic proficiency and artistic content is becoming unbearable to almost all sensitive minds. I doubt if it has ever been real — we might have admired Shelley as much if he had been indifferent to such things as

war and tyranny, though I doubt it; certainly had he been indifferent we should never have been led by him.

There is no Hippocratic oath in literature, and I am not attempting tonight to draw one up. As far as I am concerned, the artist is a human being writ large, and his ethics are the ethics of any human being. Perhaps I can best illustrate what seems to me the new consciousness of those duties of assertion and refusal from one writer, and I do not think it is without significance that this writer projects the whole situation of choice into a scientific parable, the parable of a pestilence: a pestilence many human beings are called to fight against, called not by any supernatural obligation but by the simple fact that the fight against a plague is something like a biological human obligation.

Albert Camus seems to me to be the first modern writer, though I am certain he will not be the last, to put the problem of responsibility in specific terms. 'I only know,' he wrote, 'that in this world there are pestilences and there are victims, and it is up to us not to ally ourselves with the pestilences'. For the medical scientist, who knows that he may quite well be called upon today to use literal pestilences, of mind and of body, in psychological and bacteriological warfare, that statement has a meaning clearer, I think, and more imperative than its author intended. But for the scientist as general enemy of pestilences, and the artist as general representative of humanity, the basic pestilence which, by its epidemic spread in our time challenges his allegiance, is the same — it is the pestilence which, through the spread of irrational fears and irrational hatreds, through the acceptance of coercion, through the neglect of what one can only call social and personal sanitation in our attitudes to society, leads us to forget who we are and who our fellow men are: the pestilence which exterminates 'gooks' or dissidents, which apologises for torture and massacre in any shape or form, whether it be called for the moment revolution or collective security, the pestilence of atom bombs and concentration camps. In the last resort, there is only one ethically satisfactory reply to that pestilence: an unqualified and unargued 'No'. This 'No' does not spring, I think, from any idealistic or metaphysical imperative, but simply from the fact that by saying anything else we should cease to be human beings.

I know that this view will seem over-simple to some. Very often it will be denounced as neutrality, a neutrality which is morally unworthy because of the communist atrocities here, or the capitalist atrocities somewhere else, which we ought to oppose. To that, I would reply myself that so strongly do I oppose not only atrocities of all kinds, but the

pestilence itself from which I believe they spring, that a bald reassertion of what I have called 'humanity', so far from being neutral, is a declaration of the partisanship, of being, more specifically, on the side of man. And it is because both art and science are almost by definition 'on the side of man' that the issue of choice which confronts them today seems to me more than a matter of personal ethics — it is rather the reflection in the individual of something in the social nature of the human species, something for the preservation of which the artist and the scientist have already assumed responsibility by the very nature of their work.

BBC talk, published as a Peace News pamphlet(1952) and in *Freedom*, 1st and 8th December 1951

Twenty Seven

The Individual and World Peace

What is the actual extent of the responsibility which the individual bears for world peace? I do not think I need try to stress the importance of the answer to this problem. Let me put it like this. If we believe that crime is due to a choice of wickedness by individuals we shall try to get rid of it by moral exhortation. If we believe it is hereditary we shall have to rely on eugenics. If we believe that it is a function of environment we shall try to modify the environment. This, after all, is the process of isolating a single contributory cause, to work upon, which we use in tackling any process and modifying it.

At the present time we are just beginning to approach the problems of society, of which war is perhaps the chief, by way of scientific study instead of along the traditional lines of what we can call Western political thought. We want to deal with these problems, if possible, by the same general methods as we have used, with such outstanding success, in dealing with phenomenon like smallpox. And I feel pretty certain that the most important addition to our understanding of man and society

since the beginning of the century has been the demonstration that human behaviour is comprehensible — not something springing from a mystical background of original sin and original virtue but an intelligible response of an entity, human character, to its environment. Now the progress of sociology has been fairly rapid since it became a separate discipline, and if we wish to apply what we know about man and society to this problem of war, we have reached the stage when we must give some kind of answer to the question of responsibility for war and for peace if we are going any further. If war comes primarily from the aggressive impulses of the public at large, then we have got to begin a widespread and very difficult process of re-education. If not, where does it begin? Or, to put it differently, how much help can we expect from the average member of modern urban societies in getting rid of war?

When sociology began to investigate human conflicts it very naturally started on the limited ones which are most readily to hand, the conflicts between groups. These are pretty general in all countries. It happens that America was, to a large extent, the cradle of this kind of investigation, and America has a particularly large number of classical group conflicts within its borders — class conflicts, conflicts of interest and religion and, particularly, racial conflicts. I think, as I am going to argue later on, the data from conflicts of this kind have been allowed to colour our attitude to war to the exclusion of other factors. The type of mechanisms which have been most studied are probably familiar to you by now — projection, which means, roughly, blaming our own defects on people outside the group; hostility to out-groups, to people who are, or whom we think to be, unlike ourselves; stereotypes, which means the creation of an Aunt Sally — that all Jews are usurers, and that any Jew we meet who is not a usurer is not typically Jewish; and a number of other kinds of emotionally loaded thinking which go with group conflict. And so a definite picture has been built up of the way in which enmities are built up and maintained.

Parallel with this has been the very large body of psychoanalytical work on the origins of aggression. The two main conclusions, in so far as I can summarise them here, are that aggression in the bad sense is invariably the outcome of the frustration of more positive emotions, such as love and creativity, and that unless it finds harmless outlets it will find harmful and destructive ones. That, of course, is a gross oversimplification, to which I will come back presently. At the same time, it has become increasingly obvious that large centralised urban cultures provide a higher degree of frustration for our co-operative impulses and a far smaller number of socially tolerable outlets than any others of which

we have record. They provide an enormous dump of explosive material which can be the fuel of all the types of irrational hostility.

From these data there has come into existence a sociological interpretation of war which is widespread among sociologist and which one could almost call official. It is a reasonably comfortable doctrine, because it does not call in question the political assumptions on which any sociologist living in a Western culture is bound to have been brought up. It is that all human beings are aggressive at times, and all are liable to be irrational when their emotions are involved. In national societies anti-social behaviour arising out of this tendency is curbed by the state. International aggression, on the other hand, is not so controlled, because there is as yet no world government to enforce law and order. So the task of sociology is twofold — to try to educate the public out of its irrationalities and to work for world government equipped with sufficient power to coerce all groups into sociality. QED.

You see the presuppositions here. First of all, each of us carries a small part of the responsibility for war by virtue of our own aggressive impulses. Second, law is necessary as a means of keeping these impulses under control. Now the first of those assumptions is based on the study of group conflicts, and it is unquestionably true. The second we ought to examine, because it is put forward as self-evident. But if we look at it closely we shall see that it is only a restatement of something which has been said throughout the whole history of political science, that power in the hands of government is an instrument, if not the main instrument, through which human beings implement their will to sociality and order.

What I am suggesting to you is that this simple interpretation of the sociology of war has been blown sky-high even before it was formulated in its present shape, and the form of the theory which is replacing it, as the outcome of observational research, is one which has implications far outside the field of international relations. It means that the whole body of assumption on which Western political thought has been founded is called in question. A great many people are going to find that process unpleasant, but it is, in essence, a repetition of the revolution in thought about human status which came from the work of Darwin, and the revolution in thought about human motives which came from the work of Freud. This time it is, I think, a revolution in our thought about power. And the two sets of observations on which it depends are derived one from psychiatry and the other from history.

Let me begin with the historical evidence. It seems fairly clear than any interpretation of war which represents it as a spontaneous uprising

of repressed aggression in the public is an overstatement. If we examine recent wars we have an unparalleled body of data about gross acts of delinquency between nations — war crimes, as we now call them. Now there is good evidence that in no single case were the major acts of this kind the outcome of an outburst of any sort of mob feeling. They were without exception the work of individual psychopaths *in office*, carried out, as a rule, by enforcement agencies of government, such as the police and the army, or inched into public acceptance by intensive propaganda. Specific individual acts of aggression which follow the lines of the mob lynchings or mob pogroms which have been studied were limited to minor delinquency — rape, looting, ill-treatment of minorities of aliens or prisoners, and so on. Wherever there has been direct personal contact between populations, however hostile they were to each other, the main concern of their governments has not been to prevent wholesale spontaneous massacres, like the Indian communal riots, but to prevent fraternisation. No aggressor nation within the last three centuries, with the possible exception of England during the Boer War, has been able to dispense with military conscription, enforced by the direst punishments. If we look at the history of recent wars, and still more if we select the two most serious single acts of delinquency in the last war, the German pogroms and the Allied policy of indiscriminate bombardment, we shall see that neither originated in the aggressive impulses of the public. Both were imposed from above and cultivated by intensive propaganda from the centre, and both, if we trace them further, turn out to be the work of individual psychopaths in office.

Now that is an observation of extreme importance, because it must radically affect our attitude towards individual responsibility for war. The theory that one can equate modern war with group conflict, such as the Negro problem in America or the communal problem in India, does not fit the observed facts. The part played by factors of this kind has been in enabling psychopathic individuals who have secured office to get the acquiescence of the publics they govern. That acquiescence, even in a regime like Nazi Germany, has been precarious. Reichman, in his book on anti-Semitism, points out that at a time when the pogrom was in full swing 'objective' anti-Semitism, due to friction between Jews and Gentiles, was negligible compared with 'subjective' anti-Semitism directed against imaginary Jews and worked up from above. At the height of the bombing of London a Gallup poll showed only a 53 to 38 majority in favour of indiscriminate bombing, and there was an almost complete inverse correlation between keenness to bomb and experience of bombing — London

showed 47-45 per cent against. What all this boils down to is this: under modern conditions there is no will to war among large urban publics. There is the material from which wars can be made, but they originate not in group conflict but in the personnel of government, in individuals who are mentally deranged and who secure office.

That, then, is a possible theory of war, an alternative to the spontaneous aggression hypothesis. How does it square with the work in general psychiatry and in anthropology?

If we look at the work which has been done in primitive societies we shall see that they fall pretty readily into two types, with many intermediate gradations. One group of societies is warlike and the other relatively pacific. Within each type, there is substantial consistency in personality-type, which arises from the substantial uniformity of custom and upbringing in a small social group. Now there is a definite set of characters which goes with warlike behaviour in a primitive culture. These are a tendency to rely on coercion as a means of making individuals behave according to the tribal rules, an absence of spontaneity and of free co-operation, an emphasis on punishment and discipline, a deep-seated guilt or fear regarding sexuality, and a particular kind of character-structure in the individual which is very close to that of the compulsive neurotic. The other group tends to reply on public opinion as a source of conduct, and shame, rather than guilt, as a sanction: to value spontaneity rather than discipline, to accept sexuality without any special fear or concern, and to practice co-operation rather than coercion. These two types have been called power-centred and life-centred societies, and though I cannot go into that here in detail, there is a great deal of evidence from psychoanalysis which relates the two types of patterns of parent-child relationship — they are sometimes called patriform and matriform societies. We cannot apply these names to cultures like our own, because large nations are built up from a multiplicity of groups, but we can identify power-centred and life-centred *individuals*, and they show the same characters — the syndromes have been summarised as 'cruelty, chastity and coercion' and 'sociality, spontaneity and creation'.

It is this bimodality, or multimodality, of personalities in large cultures which leads to the contradictory behaviour, the 'double-think', of these cultures seen as wholes. The patchwork of good and bad, humanity and cruelty, reason and unreason, which is Britain, America or Russia today, arises from the fact that in all such cultures two main forces are at work — the Builders and the Rulers — those who contribute social attitudes based on life, and those who contribute social attitudes based on power, to the pool of social attitude which constitutes a culture. To such diversity

of attitude we owe the continuation of growing sexual emancipation (a 'life' character) with growing militarism and fear ('power' character) in the USA today — or of the emphasis on construction and work ('life' character) with intense ideological rigidity (a 'power' character) in the USSR. In every such culture there are two 'peoples', two traditions — as though each were compounded of a small minority brought up in an Aztec culture, a small minority brought up in a Samoan culture, and a majority drawing some attitudes from each. It is characteristic and evident, moreover, that in the machinery of power in all such cultures, it is the Aztecs who will predominate.

While all this work has been going on another large group of psychiatrists has been working on problems relating to crime. At the start of the century the prevailing attitude was that delinquents acted from spontaneous wickedness. Later it came to be believed that crime was innate, and later still that it was always a token of mental disorder. None of these views has survived intact, though we now recognise parts of all three as partially true. But when psychiatrists came to attempt the cure of delinquents, their 'rehabilitation', a huge body of evidence began to grow, and has gone on growing up to the present day, which completely overthrows the older view that laws modify conduct and that punishment effectively limits crime. The movement which, I suppose, began with the Quakers and was continued by people like Anderson and Wehrli has shown that apart from the totally insane almost all delinquents, however violence and however chronic, can be rehabilitated by permitting them to live in a group which closely resembles in outline the life-centred primitive society. The findings of this research have been summarised by Reiwald as follows: 'There is today an unequivocal answer to the problem — what can be substituted for coercion and aggression in criminal law? Non-violence and self-government as means of education.'

The bearing of this upon the problem of war comes from the last link in the chain of argument, the latest. Psychiatry has come increasingly to recognise that the impulses which lead individuals to acquire power, and to attempt to secure office, are in very many cases closely similar to the impulses which lead other individuals to become delinquent. There is a growing body of evidence to show that the desire to govern by coercion, to control or the rely upon the state machinery, which Western political thought has traditionally regarded as the basis of social order, is in itself an abnormal impulse, an outcome of personality deviation. I need not add that we are, of course, talking about a tendency, not an absolute. But in terms of this tendency it is possible to see that in modern

urban cultures government and enforcement tend to select and collect those individuals who conform to the power-centred rather than the life-centred type.

If we test this hypothesis by applying it we shall, I think, find so many points of coincidence that it cannot be dismissed. It fits the psycho-analytical data about the relationship between coercive behaviour and envy of the father, it fits what we know of anthropology, it fits the historical facts about the behaviour of states and of individuals in office, and it fits, finally, the observations which we can make on the origins of wars and of war crimes. Of course it can be amplified enormously. I believe that it provides the theoretical basis for what we must say and do about the responsibility for war, but it also underlines something which most of us already realise, that war cannot be regarded as a problem apart from the larger issues of the form of society, the control of delinquency, and the problem of power. Let us restate the theory to compare it with that which I called the official view of sociology.

Wars do not originate primarily in the warlike impulses of whole publics. They originate in the warlike impulses of a particular group of personalities which have become deviant as a result of forces acting in childhood. Some of these are personal, others cultural, so that certain nations and cultures may produce more than others. Modern government, so far from being the epitome of a group will to order, is the mechanism through which power-centred personalities obtain the means of working out their psychopathy. Coercion is a wholly ineffective means of modifying conduct. The part played by group aggression in war under modern conditions is a sub-ordinate one. Without a great deal of undischarged aggression in the general public, wars would probably not occur, but aggressive impulses contribute to war by giving the individual psychopath in political office the means of securing acquiescence. In other words, war is a function of the coercive conception of power.

One point of importance is that the tendency for power to select psychopaths is proportional to the size of the community. So also, of course, is the amount of damage that any given psychopath in office can do for a given amount of character deviation. In small communities political power overlaps what we call dominance, the natural tendency of individuals to arrange themselves in a sort of order of forcefulness. In small communities the desire for power itself overlaps the desire for wealth, fame, proficiency and so forth, and leadership is tested by personal contact. At its crudest level the king of a coercive primitive society is the candidate who can fight the best man in the tribe. In large

societies political power is an occupation and election is by remote control. Few electors have seen their leaders informally. As a result political power attracts those, and chiefly those, who desire it for its own sake, and who cannot secure dominance in any more personal field. The most imaginative psychopaths seek to control policy, while the aggressive psychopaths who are physically strong or who desire direct powers of coercion over others are attracted by the enforcement machinery, the prison executive, the SS, and so on, which are such important features of warlike communities today.

Now none of this is new. It has been repeatedly hinted at in political thought since the time of William Godwin, but I think that today is the first time when it could be demonstrated in terms of evidence. Inspection of the behaviour of ruling groups reared in a social-democratic tradition, when, as in Ireland in 1916 or in Kenya or Malaya today, they are faced with insurrection, should remove any doubts we may have concerning the natural reaction of power-centred individuals to opposition. English society traditionally accepts the face-value view of government, particularly since the particular form of our social democracy has mitigated extreme abuses at home and we tend to recognise them only elsewhere, in Germany, America or Russia: we may find it hard to accept a change of tradition. In fact many sociologists tend still to rely on world government exactly as our forefathers relied on national government, as a means of coercing delinquents. I think you will see the nature of the dangers inherent in any super-government based upon a still larger group, and offering still greater scope for the dramatisation of power, particularly when it is likely to be drawn from existing national governments.

I think that now we can answer my original question about individual responsibility, and we can answer it in practical political terms. It is repeatedly suggested that the individual today is powerless to resist government, even when that government is grossly psychopathic. That, I believe, is untrue. One thing which does emerge from modern work is the profound reliance of all orders, including the most tyrannical, upon public acquiescence. Now it is true that totalitarian states can coerce individuals, and, more important, can produce power-centred individuals by tampering with education, but their very extensive enforcement machinery is designed to deal with active individuals, not passive majorities. They have no defence against loss of morale. I would suggest to you that in such societies, and even in our own society, the unconscientious objector who really matters is not the man who openly

fights against war and goes to jail for doing so, vitally important as his example is. Far more important is the unconscientious objector, the man who deserts or goes slow, or even becomes ill with perfectly genuine gastric ulcers as a result of a loss of morale and a growing psychosomatic illness. But psychiatry does, of course, talk in terms of conscious choice, and if we are asked what to do today we can answer that question. What is needed in modern societies is not increased government but the growth of rational and responsible disobedience, of an awareness of the existence of a life-centred community which is normal to the human race, and from which the power-centred idea has sprung through maladjustment.

Let me illustrate the practical meaning of that from what is going on today. I believe that in America, and possibly also in England, we are on the verge of a widespread withdrawal by scientists and technologists from the support of the kind of psychopathic policy which the atom bomb exemplifies. Some will withdraw militantly, as Dr Norbert Weiner has done. Others with less insight or courage will suddenly discover pressing commitments outside military research. Others quite genuinely fall ill. All those reactions will exemplify parts of the same process, a conscious or unconscious re-acceptance of personal responsibility. It is the duty of psychiatry to bring about the same process in the general public. Let me add that these are the weapons which would enable us to defeat not only domestic psychopaths but also foreign ones. I have no space here to go into the psychology of resistance to tyranny, except to say that in order to escape it, whether it comes from inside or outside the community we live in, we have to learn individually the technique of re-asserting life-centred values and obstructing power-centred individuals. The basic problem of war prevention lies, perhaps, in bringing these life-centred values into education and the home — a problem wrapped up with the whole structure of family, sexual and personal attitude. The immediate problem lies in accepting, individually and without reserve, the need to resist power, to resist war, and to resist the psychopathic pattern of society with every resource of disobedience and mutual aid at our disposal.

The task of the 'revolutionary', the individual committed to the purposive changing of the pattern of society towards the life-centred values, can now no longer be treated as a task of political intrigue. It is a branch of medicine — its main weapons are study and conciliation upon one hand and readiness to disobey, based upon combined love and self-interest, upon the other.

***Resistance* (New York), June 1954**

TWENTY EIGHT

1939 and 1984: George Orwell and the Vision of Judgment

We sure could have fascism here, but we'd have to call it anti-fascism ...
— 'KINGFISH' HUEY LONG

I

Myths are not lies: they are more often than not stylised representations of the truth, or of a part of it. They are also simpler to take in than history. For any major event — say the American Civil War — there is a corresponding file card in many people's minds. Those who lived through the event, if they were still here, would read the school books and say 'But it wasn't like that' — in vain.

The West's defeat of Hitler has formed a mythology of this kind, in which a reluctant and effete Europe, having been intimidated by the Nazis and weakened by the anti-war burrowings of liberals, was finally shocked into response and led to victory by Churchill. It has the quality of good drama: the dithering Chamberlain, the traitor Pétain, and the awakening just in time. The story is true enough: the courage of civilians and servicemen, the Battle of Britain and the 'finest hour' were real enough — and a proper source of pride. The political picture was more complicated, as we know, and less edifying. There was indeed an anti-fascist war, but it sprang from grassroots anti-fascism.

Americans in general did not recognise what was going on while it was going on; it is not surprising if they fail to recognise it now. I think that this is one reason why they are perplexed by George Orwell. A student of his work recently wrote to ask me why he was so 'arrogant and vicious' toward opponents; she wanted help in understanding his 'pigheadedness and rhetoric'. None of these terms would have occurred to anyone who knew Orwell. Arrogance, viciousness and pigheadedness were not his trademark. Certainly he enjoyed giving good knocks, and

taking a few himself, but even in an exchange of political abuse at long range, he could drop the polemic to praise my poem.

While he and I were trading verse polemics in *Tribune* on the subject of writers who gave their support to the establishment and became 'instant anti-fascists', official style, we were exchanging friendly letters. 'I'm afraid,' he wrote, 'that I was rather rude to you in our *Tribune* set-to, but you yourself weren't exactly polite to certain people. I was only making a *political* and perhaps a moral reply, and as a piece of verse your contribution was immensely better ... there is no respect for virtuosity these days. You ought to write something longer in the same genre ...' Vicious and pigheaded? Hardly. Rather a man unsparing of himself, facing excruciating moral decisions (as we all were) in the dark; detesting fascism but afraid of a sell-out by the Old Firm.

Orwell and I started off badly, in an exchange of letters in *Partisan Review* (May 1942) — I accusing him of intellectual-hunting; he accusing me, when I pointed out that adversity tended to produce great literature, of 'hoping for a Nazi victory because of the stimulating effect it would have on the Arts'. It is a sign of the times that we assaulted one another's positions before finding out exactly what they were. I probably mistook him for a hard-line Marxist, while he mistook me for another of Middleton Murry's equivocal disciples. When we got into direct correspondence, he showed not the slightest malice, though we had publicly misrepresented one another. Thereafter we started serious if intermittent discussion, first of literature, then of the war.

It has always struck me in re-reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* how very differently it must ring to readers in America, who did not live through all this — and to those in Europe who are too young to have lived through it — compared with those of us who shared the personal choices which Orwell was facing when he wrote it, and our fears about the likely course of European history. Of course we were scared by Nazism and Stalinism, but we were even more scared by the awareness that in our own bland, manipulative democracy there were termites in the floorboards and that the floor was programmed to collapse under our own weight, not under Hitler's or Mosley's legions. If one was not there, or was not aware of these things, choices were simple: Chamberlain was a gentleman whose error in taking Hitler for a gentleman, though disastrous, was more naive than discreditable, and once war had been declared we were all comrades in an unpleasant but necessary task; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was no more than a rather high-pitched warning against state socialism, with a particular dig at Stalin to remind us that he was an ally only of necessity.

But that was not how it felt at the time — certainly not how it felt to Orwell when he was writing his bitter forecast of a possible world only forty-five years ahead. The props in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* come from the weaknesses of all societies, but the falling into place, which would bring 1984 upon us, depended on the conviction that there were those in all societies — not only Russia or Germany — who were mining their way toward a cancellation of European humane civilisation.

I counted Orwell as a friend, but he was a friend by post, for I met him only once, in a pub in Bermondsey soon after he had published *Animal Farm* and I had published *The Powerhouse*. I was resident medical officer at the Royal Waterloo Hospital, and I was shocked to see how ill he looked. He told me about the new novel he was working on, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which I took to be a political statement against dictatorship. His reply was astonishing — that it was, but that the model in his mind was also that of the neurotic's internal 'thought police', with Big Brother as the superego. I asked him if the two weren't the same, but he told me he had no use for psychoanalysis. I don't recall what else was said — I was too busy fitting the pattern of Orwell's intention together. Did he have a private 'thought police'? I didn't feel that that was what he meant. The sense I got from his writings was of a man who detested violence — but found it perpetually unavoidable if tyranny was to be resisted — and was agonising over where we were going. He had fought in Spain, and would have fought Hitler if he had not been terminally ill, but the sight of plump Conservatives spouting anti-fascism set off all his warning lights.

He was not alone in this. British hatred of Nazism was both deep and inflexible, but it was grassroots hatred expressed in the doggedness which civilians displayed under attack. It was this grassroots anti-fascism which Churchill embodied, with immense political effect, but Churchill did not invent it — he played along with it, and may indeed have shared it. It was difficult at the time to forget that not long before he had hailed Mussolini as the saviour of Europe. Well, we all make mistakes. What is hard to convey, given the concentration of the myth of British resistance to tyranny, is the profound sense which liberals had of something afoot, of impending treason. We did not know then of the Nazi overtures for British neutrality, but we smelled them. Knowing who was at the top, and what their form had been, it was impossible not be be paranoid about the glibness of their conversion: Eden, who had stonewalled over 'non-intervention' in Spain, before he resigned over Abyssinia; Halifax, who hoped to turn Hitler round and point him at Stalin, 'letting Fascism and Communism destroy each other'.

What exactly, modern writers on Orwell wonder when they read our letters, were we going on about? To experience the climate in which we were writing one could have to immerse oneself in the newspapers, broadcasts, literary articles and dubious personalities of 1942 — John Middleton Murry, for example, who professed pacifism but opined that Hitler was 'doing God's dirty work'. He was the prototypic 'Fascifist' whom Orwell denounced, unpleasantly reminiscent of the religious right-wingers whom we had seen in action in Spain and later in Pétain's France. There was the conventional Left, much of it still taking the Party line. There were political anarchists like myself. And there was the mass of liberal opinion, deeply disturbed if not frightened, detesting the growing tide of fascist barbarity, but even more disturbed by a gut feeling that there was dirty work going on nearer home. They were relieved by the 'phoney war' — at least we had not been bombed to hell and back yet. But what were all those old British acquaintances of Ribbentrop in high places, suddenly spouting anti-fascist rhetoric, really up to? It was as if Jerry Falwell were to open a Christian abortion clinic — unbelievable.

Orwell and I argued this, and fought it out in print. His position, like that of many another man of peace, was that Hitler had to be fought, even if the leadership doing the fighting was flawed and had nearly blundered into war on Hitler's side when Russia invaded Finland. Mine was that no government — least of all the one we had then — could be trusted to fight a war of principle; that war *per se*, because it let Nazism choose the weapons and the battlefield, would by its own logic turn into genocide — very possibly leaving the roots of Nazism intact to sprout as 'gallant allies' in another bout of atrocity; and, fundamentally, that no man could safely trust his arms or his conscience to a government. Orwell saw the argument but thought that its only effect would be to weaken resistance in the West; it was a moral luxury we could not afford. The debate was urgent, and it was a moral debate on which positions had to be taken — Hitler was on the other side of the Channel. It was also a debate in which not everything could be said, because to have laid out the alternative to conventional war — namely a sudden and well-planned take-out of Hitler and as many of his gang as possible — would have telegraphed the punch to the point of uselessness, and possibly blown an operation actually in train. (The Nazi leadership had the engaging habit of standing in a row at parades like ducks in a shooting gallery.) Accordingly, what was written was muffled. Moreover we were all being careful — enemies closer than Hitler might well be listening.

In a recent article (*Harper's*, December 1982) Norman Podhoretz argues that if Orwell were alive today he would support the New Right, and

fight against the burrowings of the same dangerous liberals who today oppose Reaganoia and nuclear arsenals. Possibly — and possibly not. It is all strangely familiar. The ineducable Right still thinks that fascist thuggery is a venial aberration if it can be used to destroy Marxist tyranny. That was not a conviction which Orwell shared.

II

Looking back at the argument I had with Orwell, and at the background of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and trying to remember what we knew, did not know and what we suspected at the time, I found a sudden and striking source of information in an unexpected place — F.W. Winterbotham's book *The Ultra Secret*. Winterbotham was the senior Air Staff representative in Secret Intelligence through the pre-war Hitler years. The impact of his book lay, of course, in its revelation of the way in which the breaking of the German Enigma Code kept the Allies constantly briefed in Nazi intentions, and very possibly turned the military scale. The revelations that struck me most forcibly, however, were incidental, if not accidental; in the light of our recollections of 1940, there were things here that we were able to decode.

Two striking pieces of information emerge. One is that Winterbotham himself was running around Germany in the mid-thirties in the cover of a Nazi sympathiser (which he emphatically was not), hearing personally from Hitler, Rosenberg, Hess and von Reichenau the complete prospectus of Nazi plans. Hitler's 'basic belief was that the only hope for an ordered world was that it should be ruled by three superpowers, the British Empire, the Greater Americas and the Greater German Reich. He gave me an assurance that the Germans themselves would destroy the Communists by the conquest of Russia,' he writes. In this enterprise he was counting on British neutrality. Winterbotham, of course, reported this important intelligence to a Cabinet committee in 1935. So Chamberlain, it now appears, must have gone to Munich with his eyes wide open.

The 'myth of Munich', actively propagated today by the Right, is that the blindness of the Chamberlain government arose from misguided pacifism. The overwhelming likelihood, as it now appears, and as men like Orwell saw it then, is that it arose from deliberate collusion — not blindness but policy, if not treason. Whether Chamberlain was a dupe of others or a co-conspirator with them matters very little. Much of the record is still unavailable; as recently as March 1983 the British government was still engaged in contortions to prevent the release of

the interrogation of the British Nazi Oswald Mosley to the public record. The likelihood is that Mosley not only named names, but knew the terms of the secret understanding whereby Britain was to remain neutral while Hitler 'liquidated Bolshevism'.

The Russians outplayed the conspirators. The Hitler-Stalin Pact seems to have been a desperate play to split the Hitler-Chamberlain entente, which paid off. Confusion of counsel and disarray in the Cabinet persisted throughout the phoney war. The Hess mission — Hitler's final attempt to contact his cohorts in England — miscarried, and World War Two began in earnest. The myth of Munich was highly necessary; one does not secure national unity against invasion by staging treason trials or exposing moles in the Cabinet. The moles were silenced, or burrowed deeper: the history of the Munich years was papered over as the lamentable weakness of decent men. But at the same time there was a price to pay for national survival: 'the Project', the liquidation of Bolshevism, still kept its proponents throughout Western power structures, and Stalin knew it — whence post-war history.

In makes sense: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the neutralisation of France had to be conceded if Hitler was to deliver on the Project. When Stalin threatened mate, the Project had to be suspended: our torpedo was out of control and threatening to sink us. Churchill, who had never been privy to the conspiracy and whose sense of national interest was sharp, joined hands with the Red Army. The moles brushed off their ruffled fur and got ready for the next round.

That is how many of us assessed the situation — not now, forty years on — but then. Among those who saw it in 1940 was George Orwell. It was an agonising choice: if we hated dictatorship, a Hitler victory was unthinkable; but a Stalin victory might be the price of frustrating him. We could not say what we thought for fear of bringing one of two intolerable conclusions nearer to reality. One could not opt for the 'anti-fascist war' — though Orwell eventually did so on the grounds of clear and present peril — without realising that buried within the 'anti-fascist' leadership was the personnel of the Project, waiting their chance to renew their aims, to pick up and spirit away the von Brauns and the Klaus Barbies to a milieu where they could be controlled, to set up the board again, with a divided Europe as the sand table for the next war game. Stalin saw it, and set about surrounding the USSR with provinces, denying the Project bases on its borders. The scene was set for Europe outside his orbit to panic, and to accept client status itself, and American bases, through collusion rather than force. That was where we came in. That is where we are now. That would be the background

for any choice an Orwell would have to make in 1983, and it would seem painfully familiar.

Informing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the blinding awareness that in 1940 parliamentary democracy, the conservative establishment, all the furniture of the political room in which we had been brought up, were wormy. Orwell had no love of these institutions, judged by their performance, but he was as profoundly English as Churchill, and Englishness imposes rules even on revolution. In sum, I think that for all his distaste of the establishment, and his awareness of its familiar forms of corruption, he had not thought it could be corrupt *in this way*, that it could actually sell out to Nazis. Even a writer as abrasive as Orwell, and as hostile to privilege, was capable of being shocked by treason. he would have been the last person to agree that politics were governed by the rules of cricket, but the unconscious assumption remained that the 'bosses', the opposition, though they might commit barbarities, weren't cannibals. If that were not so, if there were now *no* limits to what Tory Britain would do to defeat change, then we were headed for political Gehenna. Churchill and Orwell make odd bedfellows, but I think that Churchill, when he too confronted the evidence as to what members of His Majesty's Government has been up to, was equally blasted by it. Things *were* falling apart, the centre could not hold, and if so, the Rough Beast was on its way.

Americans read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a nightmare based on Stalinism. To some extent it is; but Orwell's novel of Soviet Communism is *Animal Farm*. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is rather an extrapolation of the state of Europe, and probably America, if the Project had succeeded. Unlike novels about Britain under Nazi occupation, which play up the familiar horrors, Orwell's book looks further ahead — forty years ahead — to a period when the obvious excesses had exhausted themselves, when fascism had acquired a populist, if not a human, face, and some public relations gloss; when the Old Guard would have come out of hiding, when the survivors of the establishment, British and Soviet, the privileged and the apparatchiks, would have changed sides and backed the winner — and when consumerism and high-tech would have replaced goons and gas chambers as instruments of social control.

This is a scenario far more frightening than occupation movies. A pro-Hitler Britain would not have looked like an occupied Poland — or not for long. Every European right-wing party (including Stalin's) is by tradition an alliance of two elements, masters and goons, 'snobbos' and 'yobbos'. The first uses the second — Chamberlain and Pétain and the Junker aristocracy were the snobbo or establishment element, Hitler and Mussolini

the yobbo. In the second phase of counter-revolution, yobbos turn on snobbos, as Hitler turned on the Prussian and Wehrmacht establishment. Ultimately snobbo and yobbo destroy each other, leaving only the indestructible apparatchiks (who take over both the privileges of masters and the coercive apparatus of the goons) and we have the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — glossy but coercive, a gigantic pretence. Hybridise the coerciveness and bureaucracy of Andropov's Russia with the glossiness and rhetoric of Reagan's America, and you have *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If Hitler had won, this marriage might have been consummated.

By 1984 the dust would have settled. Snobbo and yobbo alike would have been absorbed into a new political technocracy. The Jews and the Gypsies would have been long dead, unlamented by the new men, as they were by the anti-fascist Western cabinets who fought Hitler and saw the Holocaust as a deplorable business — which should not be stopped for fear of unleashing a 'flood of undesirable immigrants' (see M. Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*). Nazism, Stalinism and possibly neo-capitalism would have merged, history would have been rewritten, the traditions of democracy and of revolution alike would have been expunged — and with them humane civilisation.

This vision, to my mind, is both more realistic and more frightening than accounts of a German occupation of Britain modelled on the occupation of Poland or the Ukraine. The mythical view of Munich and the early days of World War Two deprives *Nineteen Eighty-Four* both of its context at the time it was written — when it was still a toss-up whether the British establishment would conspire with Hitler or fight him — and also of its prescience: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has not arrived in 1984, but the danger is postponed, not cancelled, and many of its features are partly in place — nukespeak instead of Newspeak, politics conducted as a manipulated media event. There are some things even Orwell did not foresee; he could have made Big Brother a Christian fundamentalist ayatollah and verisimilitude would not have been strained.

It is easy enough to expand on the political homiletics of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. My point is rather that in reading it we need to experience the world as it was when Orwell cast his mind forward to 1984. Indeed, in the fudging of the record and the myth of the West as a sleeping giant finally and unanimously aroused to resist fascism, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is brought a little closer. The forces which were active in 1939 and 1940 are neither dead nor sleeping, and we have let them rewrite history as Orwell feared they would.

From Peter Stansky (editor) *On Nineteen Eighty-Four*
(Stanford, California: Stanford Alumni Association, 1983)

TWENTY NINE

Letter after America

I have just come home after eleven years in America. It is distinctly strange to find oneself living in a colonial country, with armed police, lathi-charges and trumped-up charges as appropriate responses to trade unions, and the promise of rubber bullets to come. Mrs Thatcher, the archetypal memsahib, and her congeners have run out of natives and are applying themselves to governing Englishmen and women by the methods which led to the independence of India.

It is not that which is new: we may have slithered back to the mid-nineteenth century, but Mrs Thatcher will not last, and government by goon-squad brings its own reward in public militancy. What is new to British history is the shadow of the Marcos pattern: a country full of foreign troops and foreign nuclear bases, with a client government drawing its support and its guidelines from Washington. The Liverpool City Council and the Greater London Council threaten only the Queen of Clubs: and anti-nuclear and neutralist movements threaten the Pax Americana. Alone among the NATO countries, successive British governments have conceded extra-territorial rights to the Americans — the *New Statesman* recently quoted the terms of a secret agreement whereby, in any American-declared or Reagan-provoked 'emergency', public order, internment without trial and conscription of labour would be taken over by the occupying power.

At the same time, the Labour Party, whose right wing from Ernie Bevan on have been the chief culprits in the sell-out, is adopting at its annual conference the policies it should have adopted in the 1950s, the policies against which Hugh Gaitskell promised to fight and fight again. Neil Kinnock pledged himself to eject the American bases: he was eloquent about it, and the conference cheered him. Nobody pointed out that the only militarily credible interpretation of the secret contingency agreement is that it has a second leg which has not been published — the destabilisation and removal of any elected government which threatens the American gameplan. It could be done electorally: the magical popping-up of the egregious David Owen and the Wine and Cheese Party followed closely on Labour's first move away from

satellitism. It could be done, as in the past, by a fudge: like the Spanish Socialists who were returned on a pledge to get out of NATO, Labour might simply renege. Mr Kinnock has already been entrapped by the same right-wing colleagues who deliberately sabotaged the last Labour election campaign into a self-destructive feud with the Trots, and Denis Healey is busily undermining him in the foreign press — on precisely the nuclear issue.

When I was in America, the CIA's records were briefly opened to the public. We began to learn who was on the pay-roll. When the list reached King Hussein of Jordan, Admiral Turner closed the hatch: further disclosures would damage the public interest. A pity — the next two pages might have named names among European politicians: it would have been instructive historically to know whether all of those listed were Germans or Italians. But even if they were, and Labour's past blindness to the danger came from natural fatuity alone, if it is now elected and sticks to its guns, it runs the real risk of a Chilean-type operation. It made the fatal mistake of conniving at policies which make USS Britain indispensable to the security interests of the Pentagon, which is code for anything which the New Right in America will use military force to maintain. This is a possibility which nobody at the party conference seems to have appreciated: Dubcek and Nagy at least realised that they might have to reckon with the fraternal Red Army. If Neil Kinnock realises it he hasn't said so. Will he be able in a crunch to rely on MI5 and MI6, who have close American ties and have long been schooled to look left not right? If Rt Hon Mr Pinochet, PC, MP, has already been selected, would he be able, as Prime Minister, to find out? It was only when he got into office that Churchill found out which of his former colleagues had been in cahoots with Hitler.

Eleven years in America gives one a new perspective on the impending election. It may not, of course, come to the crunch. The enormous task of post-Thatcher reconstruction will occupy any new government: the pressure not to rock the boat by challenging our colonial status, but to get on with damage control, will be immense, and will be exploited.

I am not vastly interested in elections. I wish to be consulted, not represented. But one cannot ignore their effects, and having lived eleven years in California and seen at close quarters just how dangerous the Reagan administration is, I wish I thought that Labour saw it too. The sight of the President glad-handing military dictators and pushing Star Wars with Caspar Weinberger looking like a newly exhumed corpse at his shoulder, should give nightmares to any future Labour

administration. A nice guy like Neil Kinnock might expect to be metaphorically stabbed in the back by colleagues (that is par for the course) but not literally bumped off by paternalistic allies, as Allende was.

Should we, then, be anti-American? Anti-Weinberger, anti-Reagan, yes, but remember that America includes not only Jesse Helms and Jerry Falwell but Daniel Berrigan and the people who have been running an underground railroad for Salvadorian refugees. When I applied for a visa and declared myself an anarchist, I had an interesting conversation with a highly intelligent black official about the influence of Godwin on Thomas Jefferson, and I explained to him that anarchists in the modern world are about the only people who do not believe in terrorism and throwing large spherical bombs — simply in taking responsibility for our own actions. Liberty is by no means dead in America, though in some areas it always has been on life support. There is quite possibly more direct action there than here. In many states, referenda are as important as the election of 'representatives'. There is no Official Secrets Act: the press expose clandestine and treasonable action with very little fear of the consequences, and with no Old Boy network to get the stories dropped. There is the First Amendment. True, the universal enemies of humanity can fool too many of the people too much of the time, and people are too often fatuously vulnerable to any demagogue who wraps himself in the flag — but one can also advocate libertarian causes and wrap oneself in the flag with equal justification. It is only in foreign policy that the United States and the Soviet Union are equally dangerous bedfellows. Since Gorbachev's attempts to inject some rational self-interest into superpower relations has run head-on into Reagan's frank paranoia, the United States is possibly the more dangerous and certainly the more accident-prone of the two Tar Babies. Not anti-American, then, any more than one should be anti-Semitic because of Begin and Ariel Sharon. Those are the warts of government as a system — Jefferson realised that as well as anyone.

Oddly enough, however, it might turn out to be the xenophobia of Alf Garnett, unlovable as that is, which breaks us loose, and enables Labour, if it has the guts, to eject the bases. Faced with a Chilean situation, some Conservatives will kiss the American posterior as they did Hitler's, but not all. Even people like Michael Heseltine, who accused CND of being foreign-inspired while clowning it up in a combat jacket outside a foreign nuclear base, might end up quite accidentally and to his own amazement on the side of national self-interest. He and the miners owe one to the Queen of Spades and her attendant knaves, though for widely

differing reasons. One day somebody, not necessarily on the so-called Left, will realise that those interests involve neutrality, and the neutralisation of Europe — which a besieged Soviet government, sick of basket-case allies, constant nationalist opposition, large Catholic minorities and a recruiting ground for American agents, might eventually be prepared to swap for European reunification. Reagan will not be forever, and the American Right could salutarily be tipped into isolationism — i.e., getting its finger and its weapons out, and leaving Europe to safeguard itself by diplomacy. Accidents apart, this will eventually happen, and all of us will sleep more soundly at nights. If this is what Neil Kinnock is counting on, he is smarter than I have given him credit. Meanwhile, all of us who care both for Britain and for liberty must tighten our seatbelts and hold course.

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