BERTRAND RUSSELL

A HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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of activity, for every ancient community has developed rules of behaviour for which there is nothing to be said except that they are traditional. But egoistic passions, when once let loose, are not easily brought again into subjection to the needs of society. Christianity had succeeded, to some extent, in taming the Ego, but economic, political, and intellectual causes stimulated revolt against the Churches, and the romantic movement brought the revolt into the sphere of morals. By encouraging a new lawless Ego it made social cooperation impossible, and left its disciples faced with the alternative of anarchy or despotism. Egoism, at first, made men expect from others a parental tenderness; but when they discovered, with indignation, that others had their own Ego, the disappointed desire for tenderness turned to hatred and violence. Man is not a solitary animal, and so long as social life survives, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics.

CHAPTER XIX

Rousseau

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712-1778), though a *philosophe* in the eighteenth-century French sense, was not what would now be called a "philosopher." Nevertheless he had a powerful influence on philosophy, as on literature and taste and manners and politics. Whatever may be our opinion of his merits as a thinker, we must recognize his immense importance as a social force. This importance came mainly from his appeal to the heart, and to what, in his day, was called "sensibility." He is the father of the romantic movement, the initiator of systems of thought which infer non-human facts from human emotions, and the inventor of the political philosophy of pseudo-democratic dictatorships as opposed to traditional absolute monarchies. Ever since his time, those who considered themselves reformers have been divided into two groups.

those who followed him and those who followed Locke. Sometimes they cooperated, and many individuals saw no incompatibility. But gradually the incompatibility has become increasingly evident. At the present time, Hitler is an outcome of Rousseau; Roosevelt and Churchill, of Locke.

Rousseau's biography was related by himself in his *Confessions* in great detail, but without any slavish regard for truth. He enjoyed making himself out a great sinner, and sometimes exaggerated in this respect; but there is abundant external evidence that he was destitute of all the ordinary virtues. This did not trouble him, because he considered that he always had a warm heart, which, however, never hindered him from base actions towards his best friends. I shall relate only so much of his life as is necessary in order to understand his thought and his influence.

He was born in Geneva, and educated as an orthodox Calvinist. His father, who was poor, combined the professions of watch-maker and dancing-master; his mother died when he was an infant, and he was brought up by an aunt. He left school at the age of twelve, and was apprenticed to various trades, but hated them all, and at the age of sixteen fled from Geneva to Savoy. Having no means of subsistence, he went to a Catholic priest and represented himself as wishing to be converted. The formal conversion took place at Turin, in an institution for catechumens; the process lasted nine days. He represents his motives as wholly mercenary: "I could not dissemble from myself that the holy deed I was about to do was at bottom the act of a bandit." But this was written after he had reverted to Protestantism, and there is reason to think that for some years he was a sincerely believing Catholic. In 1742 he testified that a house in which he was living in 1730 had been miraculously saved from a fire by a bishop's prayers.

Having been turned out of the institution at Turin with twenty francs in his pocket, he became lackey to a lady named Madame de Vercelli, who died three months later. At her death, he was found to be in possession of a ribbon which had belonged to her, which in fact he had stolen. He asserted that it had been given him by a certain maid, whom he liked; his assertion was believed, and she was punished. His excuse is odd: "Never was wickedness further from me than at this cruel moment; and when I accused the poor girl, it is

contradictory and yet it is true that my affection for her was the cause of what I did. She was present to my mind, and I threw the blame from myself on the first object that presented itself." This is a good example of the way in which, in Rousseau's ethic, "sensibility" took the place of all the ordinary virtues.

After this incident, he was befriended by Madame de Warens, a convert from Protestantism like himself, a charming lady who enjoyed a pension from the king of Savoy in consideration of her services to religion. For nine or ten years, most of his time was spent in her house; he called her "maman" even after she became his mistress. For a while he shared her with her factotum; all lived in the greatest amity, and when the factotum died Rousseau felt grief, but consoled himself with the thought: "Well, at any rate I shall get his clothes."

During his early years there were various periods which he spent as a vagabond, travelling on foot, and picking up a precarious livelihood as best he could. During one of these interludes, a friend, with whom he was travelling, had an epileptic fit in the streets of Lyons; Rousseau profited by the crowd which gathered to abandon his friend in the middle of the fit. On another occasion he became secretary to a man who represented himself as an archimandrite on the way to the Holy Sepulchre; on yet another, he had an affair with a rich lady, by masquerading as a Scotch Jacobite named Dudding.

However, in 1743, through the help of a great lady, he became secretary to the French Ambassador to Venice, a sot named Montaigu, who left the work to Rousseau but neglected to pay his salary. Rousseau did the work well, and the inevitable quarrel was not his fault. He went to Paris to try to obtain justice; everybody admitted that he was in the right, but for a long time nothing was done. The vexations of this delay had something to do with turning Rousseau against the existing form of government in France, although, in the end, he received the arrears of salary that were due to him.

It was at about this time (1745) that he took up with Thérèse le Vasseur, who was a servant at his hotel in Paris. He lived with her for the rest of his life (not to the exclusion of other affairs); he had five children by her, all of whom he took to the Foundling Hospital. No one has ever understood what attracted him to her. She was ugly and ignorant; she could neither read nor write (he taught her to write, but not to read); she did not know the names of the months,

and could not add up money. Her mother was grasping and avaricious; the two together used Rousseau and all his friends as sources of income. Rousseau asserts (truly or falsely) that he never had a spark of love for Thérèse; in later years she drank, and ran after stable-boys. Probably he liked the feeling that he was indubitably superior to her, both financially and intellectually, and that she was completely dependent upon him. He was always uncomfortable in the company of the great, and genuinely preferred simple people; in this respect his democratic feeling was wholly sincere. Although he never married her, he treated her almost as a wife, and all the grand ladies who befriended him had to put up with her.

His first literary success came to him rather late in life. The Academy of Dijon offered a prize for the best essay on the question: Have the arts and sciences conferred benefits on mankind? Rousseau maintained the negative, and won the prize (1750). He contended that science, letters, and the arts are the worst enemies of morals, and, by creating wants, are the sources of slavery; for how can chains be imposed on those who go naked, like American savages? As might be expected, he is for Sparta, and against Athens. He had read Plutarch's *Lives* at the age of seven, and been much influenced by them; he admired particularly the life of Lycurgus. Like the Spartans, he took success in war as the test of merit; nevertheless, he admired the "noble savage," whom sophisticated Europeans could defeat in war. Science and virtue, he held, are incompatible, and all sciences have an ignoble origin. Astronomy comes from the superstition of astrology; eloquence from ambition; geometry from avarice; physics from vain curiosity; and even ethics has its source in human pride. Education and the art of printing are to be deplored; everything that distinguishes civilized man from the untutored barbarian is evil.

Having won the prize and achieved sudden fame by this essay, Rousseau took to living according to its maxims. He adopted the simple life, and sold his watch, saying that he would no longer need to know the time.

The ideas of the first essay were elaborated in a second, a "Discourse on Inequality" (1754), which, however, failed to win a prize. He held that "man is naturally good, and only by institutions is he made bad" —the antithesis of the doctrine of original sin and salvation through the Church. Like most political theorists of his age, he spoke of a

state of nature, though somewhat hypothetically, as "a state which exists no longer, perhaps never existed, probably never will exist, and of which none the less it is necessary to have just ideas, in order to judge well our present state." Natural law should be deduced from the state of nature, but as long as we are ignorant of natural man it is impossible to determine the law originally prescribed or best suited to him. All we can know is that the wills of those subject to it must be conscious of their submission, and it must come directly from the voice of nature. He does not object to *natural* inequality, in respect of age, health, intelligence, etc., but only to inequality resulting from privileges authorized by convention.

The origin of civil society and of the consequent social inequalities is to be found in private property. "The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, bethought himself of saying 'this is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society." He goes on to say that a deplorable revolution introduced metallurgy and agriculture; grain is the symbol of our misfortune. Europe is the unhappiest Continent, because it has the most grain and the most iron. To undo the evil, it is only necessary to abandon civilization, for man is naturally good, and savage man, *when he has dined,* is at peace with all nature and the friend of all his fellow-creatures (my italics).

Rousseau sent this essay to Voltaire, who replied (1755): "I have received your new book against the human race, and thank you for it. Never was such a cleverness used in the design of making us all stupid. One longs, in reading your book, to walk on all fours. But as I have lost that habit for more than sixty years, I feel unhappily the impossibility of resuming it. Nor can I embark in search of the savages of Canada, because the maladies to which I am condemned render a European surgeon necessary to me; because war is going on in those regions; and because the example of our actions has made the savages nearly as bad as ourselves."

It is not surprising that Rousseau and Voltaire ultimately quarrelled; the marvel is that they did not quarrel sooner.

In 1754, having become famous, he was remembered by his native city, and invited to visit it. He accepted, but as only Calvinists could be citizens of Geneva, he had himself reconverted to his original faith. He had already adopted the practice of speaking of himself as a

Genevan puritan and republican, and after his reconversion he thought of living in Geneva. He dedicated his *Discourse on Inequality* to the City Fathers, but they were not pleased; they had no wish to be considered only the equals of ordinary citizens. Their opposition was not the only drawback to life in Geneva; there was another, even more grave, and this was that Voltaire had gone to live there. Voltaire was a writer of plays and an enthusiast for the theatre, but Geneva, on Puritan grounds, forbade all dramatic representations. When Voltaire tried to get the ban removed, Rousseau entered the lists on the Puritan side. Savages never act plays; Plato disapproves of them; the Catholic Church refuses to marry or bury actors; Bossuet calls the drama a "school of concupiscence." The opportunity for an attack on Voltaire was too good to be lost, and Rousseau made himself the champion of ascetic virtue.

This was not the first public disagreement of these two eminent men. The first was occasioned by the earthquake of Lisbon (1755), about which Voltaire wrote a poem throwing doubt on the Providential government of the world. Rousseau was indignant. He commented: "Voltaire, in seeming always to believe in God, never really believed in anybody but the devil, since his pretended God is a maleficent Being who according to him finds all his pleasure in working mischief. The absurdity of this doctrine is especially revolting in a man crowned with good things of every sort, and who from the midst of his own happiness tries to fill his fellow-creatures with despair, by the cruel and terrible image of the serious calamities from which he is himself free."

Rousseau, for his part, saw no occasion to make such a fuss about the earthquake. It is quite a good thing that a certain number of people should get killed now and then. Besides, the people of Lisbon suffered because they lived in houses seven stories high; if they had been dispersed in the woods, as people ought to be, they would have escaped uninjured.

The questions of the theology of earthquakes and of the morality of stage plays caused a bitter enmity between Voltaire and Rousseau, in which all the *philosophes* took sides. Voltaire treated Rousseau as a mischievous madman; Rousseau spoke of Voltaire as "that trumpet of impiety, that fine genius, and that low soul." Fine sentiments, however, must find expression, and Rousseau wrote to Voltaire

(1760): "I hate you, in fact, since you have so willed it; but I hate you like a man still worthier to have loved you, if you had willed it. Of all the sentiments with which my heart was full towards you, there only remain the admiration that we cannot refuse to your fine genius, and love for your writings. If there is nothing in you that I can honour but your talents, that is no fault of mine."

We come now to the most fruitful period of Rousseau's life. His novel *La nouvelle Héloïse* appeared in 1760; *Emile* and *The Social Contract* both in 1762. *Emile*, which is a treatise on education according to "natural" principles, might have been considered harmless by the authorities if it had not contained "The Confession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar," which set forth the principles of natural religion as understood by Rousseau, and was irritating to both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy. *The Social Contract* was even more dangerous, for it advocated democracy and denied the divine right of kings. The two books, while they greatly increased his fame, brought upon him a storm of official condemnation. He was obliged to fly from France; Geneva would have none of him *; Bern refused him asylum. At last Frederick the Great took pity on him, and allowed him to live at Motiers, near Neuchatel, which was part of the philosopher-king's dominions. There he lived for three years; but at the end of that time (1765) the villagers of Motiers, led by the pastor, accused him of poisoning, and tried to murder him. He fled to England, where Hume, in 1762, had proffered his services.

In England, at first, all went well. He had a great social success, and George III granted him a pension. He saw Burke almost daily, but their friendship soon cooled to the point where Burke said: "He entertained no principle, either to influence his heart, or guide his understanding, but vanity." Hume was longest faithful, saying he loved him much, and could live with him all his life in mutual friendship and esteem. But by this time Rousseau, not unnaturally, had come to suffer from the persecution mania which ultimately drove him insane, and he suspected Hume of being the agent of plots against his life. At moments he would realize the absurdity of such suspicions,

* The Council of Geneva ordered the two books burnt, and gave instructions that Rousseau was to be arrested if he came to Geneva. The French Government had ordered his arrest; the Sorbonne and the Parlement of Paris condemned *Emile*.

and would embrace Hume, exclaiming "No, no, Hume is no traitor," to which Hume (no doubt much embarrassed) replied, "*Quoi, mon cher Monsieur!*" But in the end his delusions won the day and he fled. His last years were spent in Paris in great poverty, and when he died suicide was suspected.

After the breach, Hume said: "He has only *felt* during the whole course of his life, and in this respect his sensibility rises to a pitch beyond what I have seen any example of; but it still gives him a more acute feeling of pain than of pleasure. He is like a man who was stripped not only of his clothes, but of his skin, and turned out in this situation to combat with the rude and boisterous elements."

This is the kindest summary of his character that is in any degree compatible with truth.

There is much in Rousseau's work which, however important in other respects, does not concern the history of philosophical thought. There are only two parts of his thinking that I shall consider in any detail; these are, first, his theology, and second, his political theory.

In theology he made an innovation which has now been accepted by the great majority of Protestant theologians. Before him, every philosopher from Plato onwards, if he believed in God, offered intellectual arguments in favour of his belief.* The arguments may not, to us, seem very convincing, and we may feel that they would not have seemed cogent to anyone who did not already feel sure of the truth of the conclusion. But the philosopher who advanced the arguments certainly believed them to be logically valid, and such as should cause certainty of God's existence in any unprejudiced person of sufficient philosophical capacity. Modern Protestants who urge us to believe in God, for the most part, despise the old "proofs," and base their faith upon some aspect of human nature—emotions of awe or mystery, the sense of right and wrong, the feeling of aspiration, and so on. This way of defending religious belief was invented by Rousseau. It has become so familiar that his originality may easily not be appreciated by a modern reader, unless he will take the trouble to compare Rousseau with (say) Descartes or Leibniz.

"Ah, Madame!" Rousseau writes to an aristocratic lady, "sometimes in the privacy of my study, with my hands pressed tight over

* We must except Pascal. "The heart has its reasons, of which reason is ignorant" is quite in Rousseau's style.

my eyes or in the darkness of the night, I am of opinion that there is no God. But look yonder: the rising of the sun, as it scatters the mists that cover the earth, and lays bare the wondrous glittering scene of nature, disperses at the same moment all cloud from my soul. I find my faith again, and my God, and my belief in Him. I admire and adore Him, and I prostrate myself in His presence."

On another occasion he says: "I believe in God as strongly as I believe any other truth, because believing and not believing are the last things in the world that depend on me." This form of argument has the drawback of being private; the fact that Rousseau cannot help believing something affords no ground for another person to believe the same thing.

He was very emphatic in his theism. On one occasion he threatened to leave a dinner party because Saint Lambert (one of the guests) expressed a doubt as to the existence of God. "*Moi, Monsieur,*" Rousseau exclaimed angrily, "*je crois en Dieu!*" Robespierre, in all things his faithful disciple, followed him in this respect also. The "Fête de l'Etre Suprême" would have had Rousseau's whole-hearted approval.

"The Confession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar," which is an interlude in the fourth book of *Emile*, is the most explicit and formal statement of Rousseau's creed. Although it professes to be what the voice of nature has proclaimed to a virtuous priest, who suffers disgrace for the wholly "natural" fault of seducing an unmarried woman * the reader finds with surprise that the voice of nature, when it begins to speak, is uttering a hotch-pot of arguments derived from Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Descartes, and so on. It is true that they are robbed of precision and logical form; this is supposed to excuse them, and to permit the worthy Vicar to say that he cares nothing for the wisdom of the philosophers.

The later parts of "The Confession of Faith" are less reminiscent of previous thinkers than the earlier parts. After satisfying himself that there is a God, the Vicar goes on to consider rules of conduct. "I do not deduce these rules," he says, "from the principles of a high philosophy, but I find them in the depths of my heart, written by Nature in ineffaceable characters." From this he goes on to develop the view that conscience is in all circumstances an infallible guide to

* "*Un prêtre en bonne règle ne doit faire des enfants qu'aux femmes mariées,*" he elsewhere reports a Savoyard priest as saying.

right action. "Thanks be to Heaven," he concludes this part of his argument, "we are thus freed from all this terrifying apparatus of philosophy; we can be men without being learned; dispensed from wasting our life in the study of morals, we have at less cost a more assured guide in this immense labyrinth of human opinions." Our natural feelings, he contends, lead us to serve the common interest, while our reason urges selfishness. We have therefore only to follow feeling rather than reason in order to be virtuous.

Natural religion, as the Vicar calls his doctrine, has no need of a revelation; if men had listened to what God says to the heart, there would have been only one religion in the world. If God has revealed Himself specially to certain men, this can only be known by human testimony, which is fallible. Natural religion has the advantage of being revealed directly to each individual.

There is a curious passage about hell. The Vicar does not know whether the wicked go to eternal torment, and says, somewhat loftily, that the fate of the wicked does not greatly interest him; but on the whole he inclines to the view that the pains of hell are not everlasting. However this may be, he is sure that salvation is not confined to the members of any one Church.

It was presumably the rejection of revelation and of hell that so profoundly shocked the French government and the Council of Geneva.

The rejection of reason in favour of the heart was not, to my mind, an advance. In fact, no one thought of this device so long as reason appeared to be on the side of religious belief. In Rousseau's environment, reason, as represented by Voltaire, was opposed to religion, therefore away with reason! Moreover reason was abstruse and difficult; the savage, even when he has dined, cannot understand the ontological argument, and yet the savage is the repository of all necessary wisdom. Rousseau's savage—who was not the savage known to anthropologists—was a good husband and a kind father; he was destitute of greed, and had a religion of natural kindliness. He was a convenient person, but if he could follow the good Vicar's reasons for believing in God he must have had more philosophy than his innocent naïveté would lead one to expect.

Apart from the fictitious character of Rousseau's "natural man," there are two objections to the practice of basing beliefs as to ob-

jective fact upon the emotions of the heart. One is that there is no reason whatever to suppose that such beliefs will be true; the other is, that the resulting beliefs will be private, since the heart says different things to different people. Some savages are persuaded by the "natural light" that it is their duty to eat people, and even Voltaire's savages, who are led by the voice of reason to hold that one should only eat Jesuits, are not wholly satisfactory. To Buddhists, the light of nature does not reveal the existence of God, but does proclaim that it is wrong to eat the flesh of animals. But even if the heart said the same thing to all men, that could afford no evidence for the existence of anything outside our own emotions. However ardently I, or all mankind, may desire something, however necessary it may be to human happiness, that is no ground for supposing this something to exist. There is no law of nature guaranteeing that mankind should be happy. Everybody can see that this is true of our life here on earth, but by a curious twist our very sufferings in this life are made into an argument for a better life hereafter. We should not employ such an argument in any other connection. If you had bought ten dozen eggs from a man, and the first dozen were all rotten, you would not infer that the remaining nine dozen must be of surpassing excellence; yet that is the kind of reasoning that "the heart" encourages as a consolation for our sufferings here below.

For my part, I prefer the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the rest of the old stock-in-trade, to the sentimental illogicality that has sprung from Rousseau. The old arguments at least were honest: if valid, they proved their point; if invalid, it was open to any critic to prove them so. But the new theology of the heart dispenses with argument; it cannot be refuted, because it does not profess to prove its points. At bottom, the only reason offered for its acceptance is that it allows us to indulge in pleasant dreams. This is an unworthy reason, and if I had to choose between Thomas Aquinas and Rousseau, I should unhesitatingly choose the Saint.

Rousseau's political theory is set forth in his *Social Contract*, published in 1762. This book is very different in character from most of his writing; it contains little sentimentality and much close intellectual reasoning. Its doctrines, though they pay lip-service to democracy, tend to the justification of the totalitarian State. But Geneva and antiquity combined to make him prefer the City State to large empires

such as those of France and England. On the title-page he calls himself "citizen of Geneva," and in his introductory sentences he says: "As I was born a citizen of a free State, and a member of the Sovereign, I feel that, however feeble the influence of my voice may have been on public affairs, the right of voting on them makes it my duty to study them." There are frequent laudatory references to Sparta, as it appears in Plutarch's Life of Lycurgus. He says that democracy is best in small States, aristocracy in middle-sized ones, and monarchy in large ones. But it is to be understood that, in his opinion, small States are preferable, in part because they make democracy more practicable. When he speaks of democracy, he means, as the Greeks meant, direct participation of every citizen; representative government he calls "elective aristocracy." Since the former is not possible in a large State, his praise of democracy always implies praise of the City State. This love of the City State is, in my opinion, not sufficiently emphasized in most accounts of Rousseau's political philosophy.

Although the book as a whole is much less rhetorical than most of Rousseau's writing, the first chapter opens with a very forceful piece of rhetoric: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others, but remains more of a slave than they are." Liberty is the nominal goal of Rousseau's thought, but in fact it is equality that he values, and that he seeks to secure even at the expense of liberty.

His conception of the Social Contract seems, at first, analogous to Locke's, but soon shows itself more akin to that of Hobbes. In the development from the state of nature, there comes a time when individuals can no longer maintain themselves in primitive independence; it then becomes necessary to self-preservation that they should unite to form a society. But how can I pledge my liberty without harming my interests? "The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. This is the fundamental problem of which the Social Contract provides the solution."

The Contract consists in "the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community; for, in the first place, as each gives himself absolutely, the conditions are the same

for all; and this being so, no one has any interest in making them burdensome to others." The alienation is to be without reserve: "If individuals retained certain rights, as there would be no common superior to decide between them and the public, each, being on one point his own judge, would ask to be so on all; the state of nature would thus continue, and the association would necessarily become inoperative or tyrannical."

This implies a complete abrogation of liberty and a complete rejection of the doctrine of the rights of man. It is true that, in a later chapter, there is some softening of this theory. It is there said that, although the social contract gives the body politic absolute power over all its members, nevertheless human beings have natural rights as men. "The sovereign cannot impose upon its subjects any fetters that are useless to the community, nor can it even wish to do so." But the sovereign is the sole judge of what is useful or useless to the community. It is clear that only a very feeble obstacle is thus opposed to collective tyranny.

It should be observed that the "sovereign" means, in Rousseau, not the monarch or the government, but the community in its collective and legislative capacity.

The Social Contract can be stated in the following words: "Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole." This act of association creates a moral and collective body, which is called the "State" when passive, the "Sovereign" when active, and a "Power" in relation to other bodies like itself.

The conception of the "general will," which appears in the above wording of the Contract, plays a very important part in Rousseau's system. I shall have more to say about it shortly.

It is argued that the Sovereign need give no guarantees to its subjects, for, since it is formed of the individuals who compose it, it can have no interest contrary to theirs. "The Sovereign, merely by virtue of what it is, is always what it should be." This doctrine is misleading to the reader who does not note Rousseau's somewhat peculiar use of terms. The Sovereign is not the government, which, it is admitted, may be tyrannical; the Sovereign is a more or less metaphysical entity, not fully embodied in any of the visible organs of the State. Its impeccability, therefore, even if admitted, has not the practical consequences that it might be supposed to have.

The will of the Sovereign, which is always right, is the "general will." Each citizen, *quâ* citizen, shares in the general will, but he may also, as an individual, have a particular will running counter to the general will. The Social Contract involves that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be forced to do so. "This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free."

This conception of being "forced to be free" is very metaphysical. The general will in the time of Galileo was certainly anti-Copernican; was Galileo "forced to be free" when the Inquisition compelled him to recant? Is even a malefactor "forced to be free" when he is put in prison? Think of Byron's Corsair:

> O'er the glad waters of the deep blue sea,
> Our thoughts as boundless and our hearts as free.

Would this man be more "free" in a dungeon? The odd thing is that Byron's noble pirates are a direct outcome of Rousseau, and yet, in the above passage, Rousseau forgets his romanticism and speaks like a sophistical policeman. Hegel, who owed much to Rousseau, adopted his misuse of the word "freedom," and defined it as the right to obey the police, or something not very different.

Rousseau has not that profound respect for private property that characterizes Locke and his disciples. "The State, in relation to its members, is master of all their goods." Nor does he believe in division of powers, as preached by Locke and Montesquieu. In this respect, however, as in some others, his later detailed discussions do not wholly agree with his earlier general principles. In Book III, Chapter I, he says that the part of the Sovereign is limited to making laws, and that the executive, or government, is an intermediate body set up between the subjects and the Sovereign to secure their mutual correspondence. He goes on to say: "If the Sovereign desires to govern, or the magistrate to give laws, or if the subjects refuse to obey, disorder takes the place of regularity, and . . . the State falls into despotism or anarchy." In this sentence, allowing for the difference of vocabulary, he seems to agree with Montesquieu.

I come now to the doctrine of the general will, which is both im-

portant and obscure. The general will is not identical with the will of the majority, or even with the will of all the citizens. It seems to be conceived as the will belonging to the body politic as such. If we take Hobbes's view, that a civil society is a person, we must suppose it endowed with the attributes of personality, including will. But then we are faced with the difficulty of deciding what are the visible manifestations of this will, and here Rousseau leaves us in the dark. We are told that the general will is always right and always tends to the public advantage; but that it does not follow that the deliberations of the people are equally correct, for there is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will. How, then, are we to know what is the general will? There is, in the same chapter, a sort of answer:

"If, when the people, being furnished with adequate information, held its deliberations, the citizens had no communication one with another, the grand total of the small differences would always give the general will, and the decision would always be good."

The conception in Rousseau's mind seems to be this: every man's political opinion is governed by self-interest, but self-interest consists of two parts, one of which is peculiar to the individual, while the other is common to all the members of the community. If the citizens have no opportunity of striking log-rolling bargains with each other, their individual interests, being divergent, will cancel out, and there will be left a resultant which will represent their common interest; this resultant is the general will. Perhaps Rousseau's conception might be illustrated by terrestrial gravitation. Every particle in the earth attracts every other particle in the universe towards itself; the air above us attracts us upward while the ground beneath us attracts us downward. But all these "selfish" attractions cancel each other out in so far as they are divergent, and what remains is a resultant attraction towards the centre of the earth. This might be fancifully conceived as the act of the earth considered as a community, and as the expression of its general will.

To say that the general will is always right is only to say that, since it represents what is in common among the self-interests of the various citizens, it must represent the largest collective satisfaction of self-interest possible to the community. This interpretation of Rousseau's

meaning seems to accord with his words better than any other that I have been able to think of.*

In Rousseau's opinion, what interferes in practice with the expression of the general will is the existence of subordinate associations within the State. Each of these will have its own general will, which may conflict with that of the community as a whole. "It may then be said that there are no longer as many votes as there are men, but only as many as there are associations." This leads to an important consequence: "It is therefore essential, if the general will is to be able to express itself, that there should be no partial society within the State, and that each citizen should think only his own thoughts: which was indeed the sublime and unique system established by the great Lycurgus." In a footnote, Rousseau supports his opinion with the authority of Machiavelli.

Consider what such a system would involve in practice. The State would have to prohibit churches (except a State Church), political parties, trade-unions, and all other organizations of men with similar economic interests. The result is obviously the Corporate or Totalitarian State, in which the individual citizen is powerless. Rousseau seems to realize that it may be difficult to prohibit all associations, and adds, as an afterthought, that, if there *must* be subordinate associations, then the more there are the better, in order that they may neutralize each other.

When, in a later part of the book, he comes to consider government, he realizes that the executive is inevitably an association having an interest and a general will of its own, which may easily conflict with that of the community. He says that while the government of a large State needs to be stronger than that of a small one, there is also more need of restraining the government by means of the Sovereign. A member of the government has three wills: his personal will, the will of the government, and the general will. These three should form a *crescendo*, but usually in fact form a *diminuendo*. Again: "Everything conspires to take away from a man who is set in authority over others the sense of justice and reason."

* E.g., "There is often much difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest; the former looks to private interest, and is only a sum of particular wills; but take away from these same wills the more and the less which destroy each other, and the general will remains as the sum of the differences."

Thus in spite of the infallibility of the general will, which is "always constant, unalterable, and pure," all the old problems of eluding tyranny remain. What Rousseau has to say on these problems is either a surreptitious repetition of Montesquieu, or an insistence on the supremacy of the legislature, which, if democratic, is identical with what he calls the Sovereign. The broad general principles with which he starts, and which he presents as if they solved political problems, disappear when he condescends to detailed considerations, towards the solution of which they contribute nothing.

The condemnation of the book by contemporary reactionaries leads a modern reader to expect to find in it a much more sweeping revolutionary doctrine than it in fact contains. We may illustrate this by what is said about democracy. When Rousseau uses this word, he means, as we have already seen, the direct democracy of the ancient City State. This, he points out, can never be completely realized, because the people cannot be always assembled and always occupied with public affairs. "Were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men."

What we call democracy he calls elective aristocracy; this, he says, is the best of all governments, but it is not suitable to all countries. The climate must be neither very hot nor very cold; the produce must not much exceed what is necessary, for, where it does, the evil of luxury is inevitable, and it is better that this evil should be confined to a monarch and his Court than diffused throughout the population. In virtue of these limitations, a large field is left for despotic government. Nevertheless his advocacy of democracy, in spite of its limitations, was no doubt one of the things that made the French government implacably hostile to the book; the other, presumably, was the rejection of the divine right of kings, which is implied in the doctrine of the Social Contract as the origin of government.

The Social Contract became the Bible of most of the leaders in the French Revolution, but no doubt, as is the fate of Bibles, it was not carefully read and was still less understood by many of its disciples. It reintroduced the habit of metaphysical abstractions among the theorists of democracy, and by its doctrine of the general will it made possible the mystic identification of a leader with his people, which has no need of confirmation by so mundane an apparatus as the ballot-box.

Much of its philosophy could be appropriated by Hegel * in his defence of the Prussian autocracy. Its first-fruits in practice was the reign of Robespierre; the dictatorships of Russia and Germany (especially the latter) are in part an outcome of Rousseau's teaching. What further triumphs the future has to offer to his ghost I do not venture to predict.

CHAPTER XX

Kant

A. GERMAN IDEALISM IN GENERAL

PHILOSOPHY in the eighteenth century was dominated by the British empiricists, of whom Locke, Berkeley, and Hume may be taken as the representatives. In these men there was a conflict, of which they themselves appear to have been unaware, between their temper of mind and the tendency of their theoretical doctrines. In their temper of mind they were socially minded citizens, by no means self-assertive, not unduly anxious for power, and in favour of a tolerant world where, within the limits of the criminal law, every man could do as he pleased. They were good-natured, men of the world, urbane and kindly.

But while their temper was social, their theoretical philosophy led to subjectivism. This was not a new tendency; it had existed in late antiquity, most emphatically in Saint Augustine; it was revived in modern times by Descartes's *cogito*, and reached a momentary culmination in Leibniz's windowless monads. Leibniz believed that everything in his experience would be unchanged if the rest of the world were annihilated; nevertheless he devoted himself to the reunion of

* Hegel selects for special praise the distinction between the general will and the will of all. He says: "Rousseau would have made a sounder contribution towards a theory of the State, if he had always kept this distinction in sight" (Logic, Sec. 163).