
Out of Revolution

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WESTERN MAN

De Te Fabula Narratur

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Farewell to Descartes

THE YEAR OF HARVARD'S TERCENTENARY, 1936-1937, WAS ALSO the tercentenary of a great intellectual event. Three hundred years ago the rational foundations of modern science were established. It was then that the "*Weltanschauung*" which lies at the root of our modern universities was first put into a book. Its author had intended to write some comprehensive volumes under the proud title, *Le Monde*. But that philosopher, René Descartes, was dissuaded by religious dangers from publishing them in full, and limited his task to the famous *Discours de la Méthode*. In it the great idealistic postulate of the "*Cogito ergo sum*" was formulated, and therewith the programme of man's scientific conquest of nature. Descartes' "*Cogito ergo sum*" opened the way to three hundred years of incredible scientific progress.

When Descartes came forward with his "wondrous strange" Discourse, the scholastic type of university had long since been in decay. He replaced the principles by which mediæval thought had been guided ever since Anselm's "*Credo ut intelligam*," with his "*Cogito ergo sum*." Among the possible starting points for our powers of reason, scholasticism had singled out man's faith in the revealing power of God: Descartes seconded it with his no less paradoxical faith in the rational character of existence and nature.

The "*Cogito ergo sum*," for its rivalry with theology, was one-sided. We post-War thinkers are less concerned with the revealed character of the true God or the true character of nature than with the survival of a truly human society. In

asking for a truly human society we put the question of truth once more; but our specific endeavour is the living realization of truth in mankind. Truth is divine and has been divinely revealed—*credo ut intelligam*. Truth is pure and can be scientifically stated—*cogito ergo sum*. Truth is vital and must be socially represented—*Respondeo etsi mutabor*.

Our attack on Cartesianism is inevitable since “pure” thought encroaches everywhere on the field of social studies. Historians and economists and psychologists cannot stand the idea of not being “pure” thinkers, real scientists. What a frustration!

I am an impure thinker. I am hurt, swayed, shaken, elated, disillusioned, shocked, comforted, and I have to transmit my mental experiences lest I die. And although I may die. To write this book was no luxury. It was a means of survival. By writing a book, a man frees his mind from an overwhelming impression. The test for a book is its lack of arbitrariness, is the fact that it had to be done in order to clear the road for further life and work. I have done all in my power to forget the plan of this book again and again. Here it is, once more.

Through Man’s own revolutionary experience, we know more about life than through any outward observation. Our ecodynamic moving through society is the basis for all our sciences of nature. Distant nature is less known to us than man’s revival, through constant selection of the fittest, and through conscious variation. Man’s memories of his own experiences form the background of all our knowledge of society and of creation.

Science, and history in its positivist stage, underrated the biological element in both nature and society. They took physics and metaphysics, measurable and weighable matter and logical and metaphysical ideas as the elementary and basic foundations on which to build our knowledge. By beginning with abstract figures in physics, or general ideas in metaphysics, they never did justice to the central point in our existence. For neither physics nor metaphysics can offer us any practical base from which to enter the fields of biology or sociology. Neither from the laws of gravity nor from the ideas of logic or

ethics is there any bridge to lead into the realms of life, be it the life of plants and animals or of human society. Dead things are forever divided from the living; figures and ideas belong to the limbo of unreality.

We can drop the methods of the past. The schemes of that era, whatever they might be, were based on either physics or metaphysics. Some were subjective and some were objective; some were idealistic and some were materialistic, and many were a mixture of both. But they were unanimous in assuming that scientific thought should proceed from the simple facts of physics or general ideas. They were unanimous in assuming that either the laws of gravity or the laws of logic were primary and central truths on which the system of knowledge must be built. They all believed in a hierarchy with physics and metaphysics at the bottom, as primary sciences, and a ladder reaching upwards to the second and third stories of the house of knowledge. Once we see the cardinal fallacy of this assumption, Marx becomes as much the son of a bygone era as Descartes or Hume or Hobbes. They all look astoundingly akin. They all set out with abstract generalities on man's mind and on the nature of matter.

We renounce their approach to knowledge. "Thought" and "being," mind and body, are not the right points of departure for the masteries of life and society. Physics, interested in the mere being of abstract matter, and metaphysics, speculating about man's ideas, are at best marginal methods for dealing with reality. They do not touch the core, since they begin by investigating dead things or abstract notions. They are not concerned with the real life, either of natural creatures or of society. It is quite true that the universe is full of dead things and the libraries of men full of abstract concepts. This may *explain* the former presumption that, in studying a vast quantity of stones, gravel and dust, or an endless series of doctrines and ideas, one was attacking the substances which preponderate in the world. Yet this presumption remains a vicious circle. In a whole valley of stones and lava, one blade of grass is enough to refute a system which pretends to explore the grass by weighing and measuring all the gravel in the valley. In the

same way, the presence of one living soul among the three million volumes of a great library offers sufficient proof against the notion that the secret of this soul is to be found by reading those three million books. Coal can be explained as the embalmed corpse of ancient forests; no tree can be explained by investigating anthracite only. Physics deals with corpses, and metaphysics with formulas from which the life has passed away. Both sciences are concerned with secondary forms of existence, remnants of life. The scientific treatment of these remnants may be very useful; yet remains a secondary form of knowledge. Life precedes death; and any knowledge of life in its two forms of social and cosmic life can rightly claim precedence over both physics and metaphysics. The two modern sciences of life, biology and sociology, must cease to take orders from the sciences of death, physics and metaphysics.

In a recent series of publications on biology, called "Bios" and inaugurated by the leading American, German, and English biologists, the first volume, written by A. Meyer and published in 1934, is devoted to this Copernican revolution. Meyer shows that physics has to do solely with an extreme case in nature, its most remote appearance. Therefore physics can more fittingly be described as the last chapter of biology than as the first chapter of natural science. The same holds good for the social sciences in their relation to metaphysics. And the details which interest the sciences of death and abstraction, are useless for the task which lies before the explorers of the life that goes on between heaven and earth, in the fields of economics and bionomics.

By the way, since the sciences under the spell of the old hierarchy of physics and metaphysics are usually characterized by the ending -ology (viz., sociology, philology, theology, zoology, etc.), a different suffix for the emancipated sciences of life would be convenient. When we speak of physiology, psychology, etc., we generally mean the sciences in their old form still biased by the physicist's and the metaphysician's errors. While speaking of Theonomy—as now commonly used by German thinkers—Bionomics—as the English usage goes—and Economics, we have in mind the mature and independent sciences

of life which have become conscious of their independence from the sciences of death. Since we are facing the emancipation of these bio-sciences from "amalgamate false natures," a change in name is highly desirable to discriminate between their enslaved and their emancipated status.

The reality that confronts the bionomist and economist cannot be divided into subject and object; this customary dichotomy fails to convey any meaning to us. In fact, Mr. Uexkuell and the modern school in bionomics insist on the subjective character of every living object that comes under the microscope. They have rediscovered in every alleged "object" of their research the quality of being an "Ego." But if we are forced to agree that every It is also an Ego, and every Ego contains the It, the whole nomenclature of subject and object is revealed as ambiguous and useless for any practical purpose.

Sociologists like MacIver have taken the same point of view in the social sciences. The division of reality into subject and object is becoming worthless, ay, even misleading. It should be clear that in the fields of bionomy and economy it is an outrage to common sense to divide reality into subject and object, mind and body, idea and matter. Whoever acted as a mere subject or a mere body? The Ego and the It are limiting concepts, luckily seldom to be found in vital reality. The word "it," which may not give offence when applied to a stone or a corpse, is an impossible metaphor for a dog or a horse, let alone a human being. Applied to men it would reduce them to "cheap labour," "hands," cogs in the machine. Thus a wrong philosophy must necessarily lead us into a wrong society.

The four hundred years' dominance of physics inevitably leads up to the social revolution of the "It's," the "quantity" into which the workers are degraded by a mechanistic society. The politics and education of the last centuries proved a disaster whenever they tried to establish the abnormal and most inhuman extremes of Ego and It as norms. An imagination which could divide the world into subject and object, mind and matter, will not only accept the cog in the machine with perfect equanimity, but will shrink even less from the cold scepticism of the intellectual. His disinterested yet self-centred

attitude, typical of the *déraciné*, will be thought of as normal.

Moreover, when humankind approaches a development by which one of its members, a class or a nation or a race, is to be enslaved and made into an "it," a mere stock of raw material for labour, or freed to become, as a group or class, the mere tyrannic Ego—a revolution will arise and destroy these extremes. Idealistic subject, the Ego, and materialistic object, the "It," are both *dead leaves* on the tree of mankind. Our survey of revolution shows that they are both insupportable extremes. The positions of Ego and It are deadening caricatures of man's true location in society. The great European family of nations was not concerned with the production or fostering of ideals or material things, but with the reproduction of types of the everlasting man, such as daughter, son, father, sister, mother and, of course, their combinations.

The abstractions and generalities that prevailed in philosophy from Descartes to Spencer, and in politics from Machiavelli to Lenin, made caricatures of living men. The notions of object and subject, idea and matter, do not aim at the heart of our human existence. They describe the tragic possibilities of human arrogance or pettiness, the potentialities of despot and slave, genius or proletarian. They miss the target at which they pretend to shoot: human nature. Though man tends to *become* an Ego and is *pressed* by his environment to behave like an It, he never *is* what these tendencies try to make of him. A man so pressed into behaviourism by awkward circumstances that he reacts like matter, is dead. A man so completely self-centred that he is constantly behaving as the sovereign Ego, runs insane. Real man enjoys the privilege of occasionally sacrificing personality to passion. Between action as an Ego and reaction as a thing, man's soul can only be found in his capacity to turn either to active initiative or to passive reaction. To veer between Ego and It is the secret of man's soul. And as long as a man can return to this happy balance he is sound. Our knowledge of society should no longer be built on non-existent abstractions like Godlike Egos or stone-like It's, but based on you and me, faulty and real "middle voices" as we are in our mutual interdependence, talking to each other, saying "you"

and "me." A new social grammar lies behind all the successful twentieth century attempts in the social sciences.

King Ptolemæus' grammarians in Alexandria first invented the table which all of us had to learn in school: "I love, he loves, we love, you love, they love." Probably that table of tenses set the keystone into the arch of the wrong psychology. For in this scheme all persons and forms of action seem to be interchangeable. This scheme, used as the logic of philosophy from Descartes to Spencer and as the principle of politics from Machiavelli to Marx, is a grammar of human caricatures.

How far, in fact, does the "I" apply to man? For an answer to this question let us look into the Imperative. A man is commanded from outside for a longer time in his life than he can dispose of the "I." Before we can speak or think, the Imperative is aiming at us all the time, by mother, nurse, sisters and neighbours: "Eat, come, drink, be quiet!" The first form and the permanent form under which a man can recognize himself and the unity of his existence is the Imperative. We are called a Man and we are summoned by our name long before we are aware of ourselves as an Ego. And in all weak and childlike situations later we find ourselves in need of somebody to talk to us, call us by our name and tell us what to do. We talk to ourselves in hours of despair, and ask ourselves: How could you? Where are you? What will you do next? There we have the real man, waiting and hoping for his name and his Imperative. There we have the man on whom we build society. A nation of philosophizing Egos runs into war, a nation of pure "cogs in the machine" runs into anarchy. A man who can listen to his Imperative is governable, educationable, answerable. And when we leave the age of childhood behind us we receive our personality once more by love: "It is my soul that calls upon my name," says Romeo. It cannot be our intention at this moment to follow up the implications of this truth in all detail. The hour for such a discussion will quite naturally arise after the facts expounded in this volume have received better consideration by the general public.

However, one central result cannot be repressed even at this early stage of the "re-alignment of the social sciences" through

the study of human revolution; and that is, that this study offers more realistic notions for man than the study of his mind or body. For the famous concepts derived from mind or body were, as we have said, "subject" and "object"; and they are not to be found in healthy men in a healthy society. Man as a subject or as an object is a pathological case rather. The everlasting man as a member of society can only be described by reviewing the faculties which he has shown to us in the due process of revolution. He proved to be a beginner and a continuator, a creator and a creature, a product of environment, and its producer, a grand-son or an ancestor, a revolutionary or an evolutionist. This dualism that permeates every perfect member of the civilized world may be summed up by two words that fittingly should supersede the misleading "objectivity" and "subjectivity" so dear to the natural scientists. The new terms are "traject," i.e., he who is forwarded on ways known from the past, and "preject," i.e., he who is thrown out of this rut into an unknown future. We all are both, trajects and prejects. As long and in so far as our civilization follows a clear direction we all are sitting in its boat of peaceful evolution, and are safely trajected to the shores of tomorrow according to the rules of the game. Whereas whenever society shows no sign of direction, when the old boat of its institutions seems no longer afloat, we are challenged by the pressure of an emergency to take to an unknown vessel that we have to build ourselves and in the building of which more than one generation may be devoured. To build a new boat without precedent in an emergency, is the imperative of the revolutionary. Our trajectedness and our prejectedness, then, are our social imperatives. Their interplay is the problem of the social sciences. Traject is the evolutionary; preject is the revolutionary predicate for man.

We are aware of the bearing of this attack on Cartesian science, bound up as it is with Descartes' formula, "*Cogito ergo sum.*" We take the full risk of leaving his platform forever. Thought does not prove reality. Modern man—and one need not turn to exaggerations like *Ulysses* by Joyce—is made into a bundle of nerves by thought. The modern man is pervaded by

so many "foreign-born" ideas that he risks disintegration by thinking. The mind is not the centre of personality.

Before bidding farewell to the "*Cogito ergo sum*" we should once more realize its power and majesty. This formula invited us all to join the army of research in its fight against irrational nature. Whenever a man was trained for the abstract Ego of the observer, our mastery over nature was at stake. On this unifying war-cry of "I think therefore I am" man founded his glorious technical conquest of the "objective" forces and raw materials of the world. The George Washington Bridge across the Hudson is, perhaps, one of the finest results of this religious co-operation between rational Egos. Nobody can remain unmoved by its crystal-clear form. The alliance between all the thousands and millions whose co-operation was needed before man was capable of such a technical miracle is certainly inspiring. Or as President Coolidge said when he welcomed Charles A. Lindbergh home from his flight to Paris: "Particularly has it been delightful to have him refer to his airplane as somehow possessing a personality and being equally entitled to credit with himself, for we are proud that in every particular this silent partner represented American genius and industry. I am told that more than one hundred separate companies furnished materials, parts or service in its construction." And Lindbergh himself added: "In addition to this, consideration should be given the scientific researches that have been in progress for countless centuries." This army of men enlisted against nature under the password of "*Cogito ergo sum*" deserves our lasting support.

But among men, in society, the vigorous identity asked of us by the "*Cogito ergo sum*" tends to destroy the guiding Imperatives of the good life. We do not exist because we think. Man is the son of God and not brought into being by thinking. We are called into society by a mighty entreaty, "Who art thou, man, that I should care for thee?" And long before our intelligence can help us, the new-born individual survives this tremendous question by his naïve faith in the love of his elders. We grow into society on faith, listening to all kinds of human imperatives. Later we stammer and stutter, nations and indi-

viduals alike, in the effort to justify our existence by responding to the call. We try to distinguish between the many tempting offers made to our senses and appetites by the world. We wish to follow the deepest question, the central call which goes straight to the heart, and promises our soul the lasting certainty of being inscribed in the book of life.

Modern man no longer believes in any certainty of existence on the strength of abstract reasoning. Yet he is dedicated, heart and soul, to man's great fight against the decay of creation. He knows that his whole life will have to be an answer to the call. And here, near the end of this book, a short formula may be of some use, to condense our whole endeavour into a sort of quintessence. The formula we propose, as the basic principle of the social sciences, for the understanding of man's group life is as short as Descartes' "*Cogito ergo sum.*" Descartes assumed, in his formula, that the same subject that asks a question and raises a doubt solves the problem. This may seem true in mathematics or physics, though today with Einstein even this limited hypothesis has become undemonstrable. In any vital issue, he who asks and we who answer are widely separated. The problem is put to us by a power which far transcends our free will and by situations beyond our choice. Crisis, injustice, death, depression, are problems put to us by the power that shaped our miseries. We can only try to give a momentary answer, our answer, to the everlasting protean question. Our knowledge and science are no leisure-hour luxury. They are our instruments for survival, for answering, at any given hour of life, the universal problem. The answers given by science and wisdom are like a chain of which every link fits one special cog on the wheel of time. The greatest and most universal answers that man has tried to give, like the Reformation or the Great Revolution, even these, as we have seen, *were temporary answers*, and had to be supplemented after a century had passed.

The "I think" has to be divided into the divine: "How wilt thou escape this abyss of nothingness?" and the man's or nation's answer, given through the devotion of his whole life

and work: "Let this be my answer!" "Man" is the second person in the grammar of society.

Having discovered, in every serious problem, the dialogue between the superhuman power that puts it and those among us to whom it appeals, we transfer the questioning I to regions more powerful than the individual. Environment, fate, God, is the I that always precedes our existence and the existence of our fellow creatures. It addresses us: and though we may perhaps voice the question, we are no egos in serving as its mouth-piece. Persons we become as addressees, as "you." We are children of time and the emergency of the day is upon us before we can rise to solve it.

Whenever a governing class forget their quality of addressees, a suppressed part of mankind will raise its voice instead for an answer. Society shifted from an unsupportable dualism of haughty Ego and suppressed It into its proper place as God's addressee at the point of outbreak of every great revolution. A new psychic type took over the part of answering the question of the day whenever a province of Christianity was denied its own proper voice. When Italy was a mere tool of the Holy Empire, as in 1200, when Russia was an exploited colony of western Capitalism—as in 1917—a new sigh was wrung from the apparent corpse: and no Ego, but a new appealable group was born. No governing class ever survives as a mere self-asserting Ego. It will always survive by responding to its original claim as God's "you."

Nations are grateful. As long as a shred of the original problem is before the nation and as long as the members of the governing group show the faintest response to it, nations tolerate the most atrocious eccentricities in a perfect patience. This patience and gratitude may truly be called the religion of a nation. When a man—or a nation or mankind—wishes to be re-born, whether from too much solitude or out of the crowd, he must leave both the study of the Platonic thinker and the machinery of modern society behind him, and become an addressee again, free from egocentric questions and from the material chains of the It. In our natural situation, that of being an addressee, we are neither active like the over-energetic

Ego nor passive like the suffering under-dog. We are swimmers in a buoyant and everlasting medium. The dawn of creation is upon us, and we await our question, our specific mandate, in the silence of the beginnings of time. When we have learned to listen to the question and serve towards its solution, we have advanced to a new day. That is the way in which mankind has struggled forward, century after century, during the last two thousand years, building up the calendar of its re-birthdays as a true testament of its faith.

The responsibility of inventing questions does not rest on the living soul. Only the devil is interested in bringing up superfluous and futile problems. Rightly, Tristram Shandy begins with an outburst against the "If's." The real riddles are put before us not by our own curiosity. They fall upon us out of the blue sky. But we are "respondents." That is man's pride, that is what makes him take his stand between God and nature as a human being.

Thus our formula has been given in three simple words: *Respondeo etsi mutabor*, I answer though I have to change. That is, I will make answer to the question because Thou madest me responsible for life's reproduction on earth. *Respondeo etsi mutabor*: By self-forgetting response, mankind stays "mutative" in all its answerable members. The "*Cogito ergo sum*" becomes one version of our formula, that version of it which was most useful when man's path opened up into the co-operative discovery of nature. In the person of Descartes, mankind, sure of the divine blessing, decided on a common and general effort, valid for all men, that would transform the dark chaos of nature into objects of our intellectual domination. For the success of this effort, it was necessary to cast the spell of the *Cogito ergo sum* over men to overcome their natural weaknesses and to remove them far enough from the world that had to be objectified. "*Cogito ergo sum*" gave man *distance* from nature.

Now this distance is useful for a special phase within the process of catching the questions and pondering over the answers and finally making the answer known. For the phase during which we *doubt*, we are sure of nothing but our thought; for that phase, then, the Cartesian formula was fortunate in-

deed. And since, in natural science, this phase is the most essential, natural scientists thought mankind could live on this philosophy at large. But we know already that the *expressing* of truth is a social problem by itself. In so far as the human race has to decide today on a common effort how to express or represent truth socially, the Cartesian formula has nothing to say. And the same is true about the *impression* of truth on our plastic conscience. Neither the centuries that prepared and finally produced Descartes nor we post-War people can found our common international and interdenominational efforts on a formula that says nothing about the dignity of impressions and expressions, of learning and teaching, or listening and speaking to our fellowman.

The centuries of the clerical revolutions were concerned with giving us the good conscience and the certainty of the illumination on which Cartesius was able to found his appeal to the general reason in every one of us. They had to study the problem of *impression*, i.e., how man can learn what to ask from life. For that purpose, they had to establish another kind of distance within the thinking process. And the establishing of this kind of distance had to precede that secondary distance between subject and objects as established by Descartes. If Scholasticism had not done away with all the local myths about the universe, Descartes could not have asked the reasonable questions about it. In order that man might become able to think objectively at all, he had to know first that all wishful thinking of our race was outwitted by a superior process that originated and determined the part played by ourselves in the universe.

The real process of life that permeates us and gets hold of us, that imperils us and uses us, transcends our off-hand aims and ends. By revering it, we can detach ourselves from our fear of death, and can begin to listen.

As a principle of efficient reasoning, this detachment was transferred into philosophy by the greatest English philosopher, Anselm of Canterbury, in a sentence rivalling with the Cartesian in conciseness: "*Credo ut intelligam*" is the principle distancing men from God in their intellectual practice. We

might translate the Latin (which literally means: I have faith in order that I may come to understand) in our terms: I must have learned to listen before I can distinguish valid truth from man-made truth. This, again, turns out to be but another version of our proposed formula in its triangular relation. In Anselm's statement the emphasis is on the hearing, as the organ for inspiration by truth. In Cartesius', it is on the doubting as the organ for transformation of this divine truth into human knowledge. In our phrasing, the emphasis shifts once more, and now to the process of making known, of speaking out at the right time, in the right place, as the proper social representation. We no longer believe in the timeless innocence of philosophers, theologians, scientists; we see them write books and try to gain power. And this whole process of teaching again needs the same century-long self-criticism applied by Anselmists and Cartesians to the processes of detaching us from God and from nature. In society, we must detach ourselves from our listeners before we can teach them.

Both the *Credo ut intelligam* and the *Cogito ergo sum* worked very well for a time. However, finally the *Credo ut intelligam* led to the Inquisition and the *Cogito ergo sum* into an ammunition factory. The progressive science of our days of aircraft-bombing has progressed just a bit too far into the humanities, precisely as theology had dogmatized just a bit too much when it built up its inquisition. When Joan of Arc was questioned under torture, her theological judges had ceased to believe. When Nobel Prize winners produced poison-gas, their thinking was no longer identified with existence.

Our formula "*Respondeo etsi mutabor*" reminds us that human society has outgrown the stage of mere existence which prevails in nature. In Society we must respond, and by our mode of response we bear witness that we know what no other being knows: the secret of death and life. We feel ourselves answerable for life's "Renaissance." Revolution, love, any glorious work, bears the stamp of eternity if it was called into existence by this sign in which Creator and creature are at one. "*Respondeo etsi mutabor*," a vital word alters life's course and life outruns the already present death.