An Age of Crisis
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CULMINATIONS

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven."—Wordsworth

THE ONSET of the French Revolution was greeted with joy and hope by those philosophes who were still living. The old order was to be changed at last. Reason was to have its day, its chance to reorganize society and to re-direct men as natural laws and social utility dictated. Unfortunately, both joy and hope were to be ground into the ashes of disillusion, as nothing worked out the way it should have. Wordsworth returned to England, eventually to become a Tory and an opponent of the Revolution. Condorcet, the child of the philosophes, a noble idealist who tried to maintain his principles, became the victim of the happy millenium whose arrival he had applauded. A fugitive from the Terror, half-starved, he took his own life in despair, yet not before he had reaffirmed his belief in an unlimited vista of human progress, in the “Dixième époque” of his Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain. Mirabeau, a follower of the philosophes, who had jumped into the fray with ardor, perhaps was saved by death from a similar fate. Robespierre, too, greeted the Revolution with joy. On July 23, 1789, he wrote to Buissart, “The present Revolution, dear friend, has let us see within a few days the greatest events that the history of men has to show.” ¹ Robespierre, within four years, was to travel a road that

¹ Correspondance, p. 42.
led to the Terror, to the opposite extreme from his starting point.

One of the aspects of the marriage or liaison between the French *philosophes* and the Goddess of Liberty was the practice of electing non-French philosophers or other writers to honorary citizenship in the French Republic. Bentham, Wieland and Klopstock were among those so honored. Many of the recipients of this honor later sent back the diploma in which it was conferred—a fact which again testifies to the widespread disappointment with the constructive accomplishments of the Revolution, with their lack of correspondence to the hopes and dreams aroused in the hearts of those who had been nourished on the writings of the *philosophes*.

While the failure of the Revolution was in no way *caused* by the ideas of the eighteenth century, it nonetheless casts light on the weakness of those ideas. The Revolution was a critical, extreme moment of crisis. But it was the culmination of the crisis that had been building up during the century; and it is in such moments that the implications of a philosophy and the contents of a culture are revealed. Has not European history, moreover, been one of increasing crisis and extremism ever since then? The course of the Revolution was determined, to be sure, by tensions due to conflicts, fears, hatreds and animosities, and by the dynamics of revolution itself. But the Revolution was also an attempt to implement ideas of the eighteenth century; and its failure reflects in some measure, at least, upon the inadequacies of those ideas and the outlook they embodied. While it would be patently absurd, then, to cast any responsibility on the *philosophes* for the complex circumstances which determined later happenings, it is nevertheless true that the intellectual climate which they helped to create was an important part of those circumstances, insofar as men's ideologies and outlooks affect their decisions and their behavior. What had been in the realm of mind came to life in the realm of political events. The French Revolution was the logical crowning of a hundred years of struggle to free men's minds and institutions from a thousand years' dead weight of medievalism. The men of the Revolution tried to create the rational society of which the *philosophes* had dreamed.\(^2\) It is significant that Sade was to see

\(^2\) See Henri Peyre, "The Influence of Eighteenth Century Ideas on the French Revolution," and B. Groethuysen, *Philosophie de la Révolution française*. The latter work must be read with caution, as the author generalizes far too easily, fails to estimate properly the character of eighteenth century pessimism and the anti-
in the Revolution and in the Terror which climaxed it the failure of rationalistic attempts to reform society, and of the rationalizations that defended society with the pretense of morality; the failure, in fact, of society and culture themselves.

Although our study is still incomplete, let us turn back to that part of eighteenth century thought which we have explored, in order to review the new directions that were taken and the promises that were held out—many of which accompanied the revolutionary tide.

The eighteenth century was in several ways a turning point in our cultural history. It was an age in which the streams of the past were gradually infiltrated by new facts, new meanings and new attitudes. Turbulence and confusion resulted. The absolute, the essential and the rational swerve toward the relative, the existential and the empirical, in a disordered mixture. A new positivistic outlook denounces hypotheses and mathematical a prioris; yet, unable to find explanations and solutions according to its own methodology, this positivism supposes and imagines what it cannot observe, and uses the very rationalistic approach it condemns. The supernatural is submerged by the natural. Science allies the empirical and the rational, seeking, in the historical particular, the essential of law. Anthropology triumphs over metaphysics, psychology over logic. Reason and sentiment are locked in endless debate, the more entangled because a sentimentalist, like Rousseau, believes in the value of human reason, properly used, while a supposed empiricist, like Diderot, is suffused with pre-romantic sentiment.

Whereas the physical sciences had already, in the seventeenth century, broken the shackles of the ancient and medieval worldviews, and looked at nature objectively, in ethics the inherited faith in an immutable moral order, supported by the Divinity, continued to struggle vigorously, backed by the fear of many men that mankind was about to become entirely lost in a strange and alien world it had not dared to conceive of before. The physical sciences had expelled from the universe considerations based on omous values of "nature." Cf. also the statement of Burke (a prejudiced observer, to be sure): "I hear on all hands that a cabal, calling itself philosophic, receives the glory of many of the late proceedings; and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them." \(\text{Reflections . . . , p. 86.}\)
penetrate into the world of man. The security that came from the consciousness of being sheltered by an inviolable order, an order designed for man and embodying a meaning that in turn gave meaning to human life and aspirations, was forever shaken. This trend was abetted by a nascent revolution in the biological sciences. Life, it appeared, was only an accident of matter's endless transformations, and its changing convolutions were determined by its own built-in dynamism. Already, in the minds of some, the notion of organic evolution was dawning. This discovery was to complete the rout of faith in man's majesty and security, and in the whole inherited conceptual framework in which he had pictured himself, by ironically changing his origin from God-sprung to a humiliating unfolding of lower forms.

But other men were not afraid. They were determined to face the naked reality of their true place. They were further resolved to apply the empirical method to ethics, and to find a way in which they could live without illusion, and yet live as moral beings, convinced that in the long run a moral order must be of man, and for man. A new courage was now necessary, for whether or not they realized it, mankind was now embarked on a dangerous journey that would take it to the end of the night.

The defense of suicide was one dramatic manifestation of this revolution, and of the intellectual dilemmas it created. It uncovered the bifurcation between a humanistic and an authoritarian view of man's estate. Its chief significance was precisely the establishment of the specific character of moral law as a function of man's specific nature. It was a recognition of a distinctive human rationality. For this act, no matter which attitude one took towards it, epitomized every man's isolation, and his independence in value creation: either by his legitimate mastery over his own destiny or by his very rebellion against a supposed order in which he had been assigned his proper place. At the same time, the effort to subsume the act of suicide into the universal natural order was both a part of the attempt to unify nature and human reason, and a move to withdraw man from his supposedly privileged status.\(^3\)

\(^3\)The debate over suicide had a parallel, with some of the same overtones, in the controversy over inoculation. See A. H. Rowbotham, "The 'Philosophes' and the Propaganda for Inoculation of Smallpox in Eighteenth Century France." The opponents of inoculation said that smallpox was a *natural* risk sent by providence, inoculation an *unnatural* risk. Inoculation is a kind of moral probabilism. "The
For man to have a moral life, three conditions are prerequisite. First, there must be an accepted distinction between good and evil, and an obligation to do the good. Second, man must be capable of knowing the good. Finally, he must be capable of doing it. Part of the eighteenth century crisis was the re-discovery and triumph of the idea (at least, in many minds) that moral good and evil exist only for man, and in man, and have no other ontological status or support. To these minds it appeared evident that the essential truth which had to be accepted is that “the ethical is not to be discovered in any form of the world-process.” This fact, which may be considered as humanity’s greatest title to dignity and to glory, was greeted with dismay in many quarters. Christians denied and denounced it. Deists tried desperately to conserve a moral principle in an infinite, undifferentiated Newtonian universe that had no structure in the medieval sense of a rational and hierarchical cosmos. But even they, for the most part, knew that man now had to find his way without God’s help. And the debate over evil showed that the march towards divorcing God and the universe from human values could not be halted. The upshot was that no significant purposes for life could be found in the history of the universe, but only within the life of man himself. The depth of the crisis is at once evident. Man found himself utterly without significance, lost in endless space and time, and simultaneously, the center and end-all of his own little universe, ready to annihilate the world, as Schopenhauer says, to maintain his own self a little longer. The very existence of moral good and evil—that is, of good and evil outside of mere individual sentiency—was challenged, and it became necessary to substantiate their objective reality in other ways. This most of the *philosophes* were confident they could do. But if we put together two of the basic postulates of eighteenth century radical thought, that all acts are indifferent
in a universe without an objective or absolute order, and that man, as a non-transcendent element of nature, is solely a part of this order, then the foundations of moral nihilism are assured, and the effort of rational solutions becomes very difficult.

In the second place, believing, for the most part, in the objective reality of right and wrong (though not in their absoluteness), the *philosophes* did not doubt that men, as moral beings, know the right and the wrong. But can they do the good which they know, and will they do it? This was the heart of the matter. The difficulty lies not only in man's egoism, but in his unique intelligence and freedom, which enable him to circumvent and overcome any restrictions, often even those of nature. He is different from other animals, many agreed, inasmuch as his behavior is not determined by inherited instincts, and he does not always have to do the same things, in the same way. This concept was particularly in accord with the materialists' belief that it is man who created the moral world, and added it to a value-less universe—a view they entertained despite their denial of transcendence, on a purely natural basis. But there is another freedom, which conflicted with the resistance to Christianity and with the desire to integrate man into the purely natural realm. Therefore these thinkers denied man moral freedom and limited his power to fulfill the obligation he might perceive. Yet it is doubtful that those who denied him freedom would have given him a definite essence, a fixed potentiality and specific modes of expression, like other natural things. On the other hand, a few extremists went even further, and denied obligation itself; for man, they reasoned, is of nature, and nature knows only life and death, pleasure and pain.

Either moral judgments and values are innate and natural, and man is an exception; or he creates them, by reason and experience, and he is still an exception. Most of the *philosophes* did not deny this. What they tried to do was to make the moral realm part of the natural realm, as in their attitude to suicide, and to justify its validity. Their rejection of man's separateness was, at bottom, the desire to sever him from a providential God and a chimerical supernaturalism, and (for some of them) the desire to establish physical nature as the sole and universal reality. They were guided by humanistic motives, and did not wish to debase human dignity. But here again rose a dilemma, and a danger.
Was man to be freed from servitude to God, only to be enslaved to nature? Does not man transcend, even deny nature, in his rational and social activities, or are these only disguised and complex forms of needs and drives which he shares with other animals? On this fundamental issue independent thinkers divided into two groups. Some, notably Rousseau, and Diderot in his later writings, recognized that for the human animal, culture transcends nature in many respects, and that man transcends culture. The more radical disciples of La Mettrie and Condillac, following the new thought in science and psychology, developed the monistic conception that there can be only one form of being and of law; both the physical and the moral order are reducible to matter and motion. Man, as Cassirer has put it, has no existence except in nature; even in thought he can only apparently transcend nature's law and the world of sense, since the mind's only power consists in the combining of sense data. But can the total nature of any complex phenomenon be "explained" by the irreducible elements from which it has originated?

The question of man's capacity to do what is right has another aspect. It depends also on the springs of his behavior. It was not enough to shift from a revealed body of moral laws, having their sanction in God's will, to an ethics that proclaimed its allegiance to needs and directives of human nature. What is human nature? Can morality be established on human rationality? Or if men are, on the contrary, irrational in motivation, what irrational components of their nature can be utilized, and in what way, in order to secure the desired behavior? To what extent is human nature naturally inclined to moral virtues? To what extent does living in society provide such motivations, or can it be used to build a new and valid authority, replacing God and religion, to control human egoism? How can one reconcile the fact that man is a moral being with the commonly accepted belief that the desire for pleasure and the fear of pain are his only motives, without falling into the Christian dualism?

Many other questions and problems haunted the minds of eighteenth century moralists. They rose, like ghosts, from the graves in which they had been conveniently, but prematurely buried. What is the genesis in men, and the character, of moral judgment and of moral experience? What is conscience? How could obligation be
justified, and justified in such a way that men would want to make it the guide of their conduct? In other words, what is good, and why should a man want to be good? If self-interest is the only motive, a way must be found of filling the moral vacuum that suddenly appears in man, as well as in the universe; unless, that is, we are to resign ourselves to Rameau's nephew and his like proliferating in a culture with no sure values. These, and other matters, will be the subject of the next part of our investigation.

The problem of the eighteenth century was, then, as much one of re-interpreting man himself, and the functions of his social institutions, as it was one of re-interpreting his place in the universe. We have seen how the evaluations of man and the interpretations of his motivations run the entire span from optimism to pessimism, with a heavy concentration falling somewhat left of center, towards the pessimistic side. There were those who held men to be essentially selfish, and even malicious, driven on by the craving for a comparative superiority. Many more esteemed them to be good, except when their own interest was involved. And a few even proclaimed the paradoxical doctrine that man is essentially good, or would be, were he not corrupted by human society. The extremes, in one sense, cancelled each other out through their internal contradictions. Rousseau finds men theoretically good, but actually evil. Sade finds them theoretically evil, but implicitly acknowledges that they are also good (in the conventional sense), since he assigns the fools who are good to be the victims of the strong.

Although self-interest was often defended as not intrinsically evil, being a natural and necessary effect of the desire for survival, its corruption in society, in its peculiarly human forms of rivalry, pride and lust of power, was recognized even by the most optimistic; and these were seen to be its characteristic, if not its original or essential forms of expression. Paradoxically, some of the most pessimistic thinkers emphasized the beneficial social effects of self-interest; cynics like Mandeville perceived direct good effects, others believed self-interest was a convenient lever which could be manipulated to produce desired behavior.

To be sure, man had his apologists; and the upsurge of pre-romantic sentimentality kept alive, in certain sections of society, the belief in his goodness. Many who criticized him, moreover,
were convinced of his excellence, in some regards, and of his potentialities. The opinion entertained by some writers, that he is neither good nor bad innately, may even be considered a kind of optimism, since it implies that his natural egotism can be shaped and directed, by outside forces, to the collective and moral good. But nothing could be more erroneous than to speak, as has often been done, of the “simple, naive optimism” of the Age of Enlightenment, and of its belief in “the fundamental goodness and rationality of man”; or of its unawareness that “civilization was a thin and precarious crust,” and of its superficial view of human nature that ignored “so many of the deeper and blinder passions both good and bad which inhabit the human heart.”

The optimism of the Age of Enlightenment was, for the most part, not about human nature, but about what could be done with human beings, through the progress of science, through education and government, and in general, through the rational reconstruction of society. Its confidence was less in man’s reasonableness, than in the power of reason to devise ways of coping with such a creature. This was the hope, but it overlay a substratum of pessimism about man himself. We have seen that many of the writers, on both sides, were aware of man’s basic irrationality, and of the reality of radical evil in him (that is, of evil in the core of his personality, his will).

We have observed the “will to evil” which forms so strong a current in the novel, and the competitive power drive which underlies Rousseau’s philosophy of man in society. Even if men know what is right, the force of their natural instincts is such that they often cannot do the right, or do not want to. The thinkers of the Enlightenment were acutely conscious of the corruption of self-interest in all ideal pretensions of human culture; consequently, their major and continuing effort (except for a few nihilists and anarchists) was to control the workings of that spring of action, by using it to control itself. They did not, as is often claimed, undervalue the power of self-interest;

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6 See especially chapters 8 and 9 of this section.

6 Some of the phrases I have quoted come from a review in the London Times. But many others have expressed similar views, including Carl Becker (The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers), R. L. Ketcham (“James Madison and the Nature of Man”), and even R. R. Palmer, in his excellent book, Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth Century France. Monod’s statement, “the idea of man’s goodness . . . the deep and most fervent faith of the century,” is founded on a superficial view of the defense of the passions. (Op. cit., p. 291.)
they overestimated the ability of social institutions to effectuate such a control. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that they underestimated the amount of conditioning and coercion that would be required, once a society embarked on such a scheme; and this is what the French Revolution, and later, the Communist revolutions, were to show.

It is true, on the other hand, that they also frequently overestimated—in defiance of their own analysis—the power of rationality to distinguish ultimate self-interest and to give it a greater weight than immediate self-interest and thus to achieve a limited control of egoistic propensities. In other words, their hopes of what could be done with man rested partly on an assumption of rationality and good will which much of their own theory denied.

This is nowhere clearer than in Chastellux’s *De la félicité publique*. History, declares Chastellux, shows that governments have always been founded on force, ambition and jealousy. But this is a matter of ignorance and error. “It is therefore for enlightenment, for true philosophy, to change men’s fate.” If Rome and Christianity failed, it was because they did not follow truth, but “blind passion, sordid interest, odious rivalries.” And if the progress of knowledge did not work out among the Greeks, it was because pride, love of glory and vanity produced political divisions, instead of unity. His hope was essentially that of Robespierre, and it foundered on the same reef—human nature.7 Condorcet was another writer who tended towards extreme optimism. Men can be enlightened, he declares; and by that he means, they can be made to realize that their true interest lies in acting in harmony with the general interest—it is merely a matter of true or false calculation. But this is an obvious admission that men are not morally motivated. Hence Condorcet’s further assurance that justice and generosity are in all hearts, and “await only the gentle influence of enlightenment and liberty to develop in them.” This effect is “in the necessary order of nature,” as much as physical laws. There is only an apparent opposition between the private and the general interest; and “the purpose of the social art” is to destroy it.8

7 P. 79, 210–216. We recall the phrase of Mirabeau, quoted earlier. Man “will always be just and happy when he will be enlightened about his true interests,” and also his contrary theory that political education consists in inspiring prejudices and passions which are conducive to the general welfare.

8 *Esquisse*, p. 289–293.
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The failure of the philosophes’ hopes and plans may thus be attributed to their unwillingness to view pessimistically their pessimism about human nature. They were entirely wrong, as La Mettrie, Diderot (at times), Rousseau and others had known, about men being willing to sacrifice concrete, immediate self-interest for a vague, ultimate self-interest. They were at least partly wrong about conditioning, in underestimating the degree of control that would be requisite to make them willing to do so.

The reasons for their attitude are not hard to find. They lie in the great surge of optimism and affirmation which rose from the discovery of the uniformity of natural laws, such as that of cause and effect, which the philosophes believed could also regulate human affairs, since man was now seen to be wholly a part of nature’s realm; a concept which was abetted by unwillingness to recognize man’s unique freedom and transcendence of nature, even in matters most natural. The same discovery blinded the philosophes with the limitless perspective of scientific advances—a triumph of man’s rational powers—which they sometimes mistook for a perspective of rational progress. We again see that the weakness was less faith in man’s rationality—they recognized fully the biological forces in man, and their peculiar cultural sublimations—than the reduction of man to a simple and universal type of natural law, based on sensation, expressed in human terms as

This despite the fact that many writers pointed out that moral laws do not work with the same regularity as physical laws. For a typical example, cf. d’Holbach, “Nature is ruled by simple, uniform, permanent laws that experimentation enables us to know... Consequently in all his investigations, man must turn to physics and experimentation: such must be the source of his information in religion, ethics, legislation, government, in the sciences and the arts, in his search for happiness and avoidance of pain.” (Système de la nature, 1, ch. 5.) This view leads both to the Idéologues and to positivism and behaviorism. It is a distortion of man, by reducing him to fit a Procrustean bed of sensationist psychology and available techniques. It obviously cannot account for man’s creative and destructive achievements, which derive from motivation that transcends biological needs and separates his dissatisfied life from the harmonies of nature as seen in the impulses of animals. Pride and power, it has been said, are more important factors in economic life than hunger and survival. The same transcendence is expressed, in different terminology, by F. S. C. Northrop, who distinguishes between natural entities “whose behavior is completely the expression of their essential nature qua fact,” and men, “whose judgments are in part at least the expression of what they think all first-order facts are qua theory.” (“Ethical Relativism in the Light of Recent Legal Science,” p. 659.) In all this we see the danger of a too narrowly conceived naturalism. We must also remember that in the eighteenth century context, and from the prospect afforded by atheism or even an impersonal pantheism or deism, there was no longer any external or higher reference enabling man to believe he could transcend nature. There was only nature; which left the dilemma of what nature is, and the relation of reason to it.
egoism or self-interest, subject to experimental verification and to control by conditioning. Only Rousseau, among the major figures, recognized the fallacy of this approach. He called for a different, a more radical revolution; yet he, too, relied on educational and legislative repression, of an extreme kind. La Mettrie, a consistent materialist, would perhaps not have fallen victim to the error. Sade, Rivarol, Sabatier de Castres were aware of it. Sade knew what evil man was capable of; and the other two advised the use of all repressive means to crush it. But the thinking of most was directed by two unconscious intellectual assumptions of the rationalist-empirical philosophy—assumptions which, as Hans Morgenthau has pointed out, persist in our own age.\footnote{Morgenthau, H., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.} One was the notion that the physical and the social worlds are intelligible through the same processes; the other, that understanding in terms of these processes is all that is needed for control of these two worlds.

What did the \textit{philosophes} mean, then, when they said that it was necessary to enlighten men? They meant, in the first place, that men could profit from enlightenment, because the freeing of the natural light of reason from the shadows of superstition and prejudice would strengthen the forces of rationality and reasonableness within them. However, few if any believed that this enlightenment would, in and by itself, make men virtuous. What they rather hoped was that the liberation of their rationality would enable them, as Condorcet put it, to perceive where their true self-interest lay. Given a universal, though not rigid human nature, the motives, but not the modes of behavior will always be the same. The best that can be done is to condition men and to provide the cultural milieu in which these motives can be directed so as to do the least evil, and the most good. This program did not signify that men were utterly devoid of good impulses and motives; but rather that these were secondary, fragile and insufficient by themselves. "Enlightenment," then, was a way of improving conditions. There is no point, for instance, in trying, first and directly, to make men tolerant. The first thing to do is to establish tolerance, in the constituted social institutions of Church and State, and then men might be made to be tolerant.

It must be remembered, however, that the ultimate reconcilia-
tion of self-interest and the general interest was not considered to be a practical and immediate program—although it sometimes sounded that way—but only an abstract and theoretical possibility. There is no real reason to assume that anyone (except, perhaps, extremist fanatics like Morelly and Dom Deschamps) thought that such an accord could be perfectly or permanently realized. It was, rather, a goal, an ideal, towards which some progress could be made, if society directed its efforts properly. As to how much progress could be made, there was a wide variety of opinions. The earlier writers, like Montesquieu and Voltaire, were most cautious in their hopes. But it is true that as the century drew towards its close, confidence in the power of conditioning processes increased, and this type of optimism became stronger in some minds.

Again, it is true that pessimism about human nature apparently clashes with the strong opposition to the Christian doctrine of man's native depravity. But if we look below the surface, we see that the *philosophes'* disapproval was not of the idea that man is evil, but rather of the theological dogma of original sin on which the Christian doctrine was based; and even more, of the anti-humanism of seeing in God's grace the only way of overcoming it. It was also a refusal to accept the condemnation of self-love and pride as evil *per se*.

That the *philosophes'* views contained their own inner contradictions, and serious, even fatal shortcomings has, I hope, been made amply clear throughout this volume. I should like merely to mention, at this point, two further contradictions which are particularly pertinent to the foregoing remarks. The first is an opposition found in many writers, including Voltaire and one phase of Diderot. It is between an ethical system based on the golden rule and Natural Law, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, a theory of human nature which indicated springs of action quite contrary to this law; a theory that was accompanied, moreover, by a social philosophy which contemplated using these same springs in its plans to achieve the ethical ends. This signified a reluctance to be rigorously consistent in the surrender to utilitarianism, and to sacrifice completely reliance on a moral good will. The second inconsistency was to proclaim—like d'Holbach and Helvétius, for instance—that men are not and cannot be
disinterested and truly moral; while at the same time, their own assumed attitude and their own efforts, in teaching men the right way, disproves that very generalization.

If much of the dynamism of the eighteenth century crisis seems like a thrashing around in concentric whirls, it must be remembered that this is true of any period of revolutionary change. The minds of men are breaking out of a circle, and it is not clear which is the best direction to take. There is no perspective on the struggle in which one is engaged. Nevertheless, underneath the confusion of battle, there was meaningful movement, in clear directional lines. It forms a pattern of revolt against the traditional concepts of man, his life and his world, and a consistent search, which we have attempted to follow along part of the trail, for new explanations and for new aims and means consonant with a naturalistic and realistic outlook.

What practical conclusions, or programs were drawn, then, from the reassessment of the human condition? There were two extremes, radical fringes that claimed only a few adherents. One was anarchism, a doctrine which itself grew out of two contrary views of man: first, from the opinion (as among the primitivists) that he is naturally good, and has been corrupted by civilized society; second, from the moral nihilism which denied good and evil, and asserted only the right of the strong. On the other extreme is a clear foreshadowing of modern totalitarian doctrines, with reliance on conditioning and repression as the only means of controlling a creature who is refractory to non-egoistic motives. In between the two was a fluctuating and shadowy program which tried to take into account both the good and the evil in man. It preferred the certainty of the self-interest motive and of determinism, as elements that could be worked with, to a weak love of virtue and an uncertain freedom. It relied on enlightenment, on the esteem motive, on education and example, and on a political and social system that would—somehow—identify the personal and the social good. To the third of these three alternatives, we may apply Niebuhr's criticism of Marxism: its proponents, while discounting the pretenses of rational man, believe that it is possible to build a society governed by a remarkable "rational coherence of life with life and interest with interest."

11 The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1, 21.
In this amorphous group of writers, however, there were wide differences. The most notable, perhaps, is seen in the two theories of self-interest: the one entertained by the Physiocrats (and some others), that what is best for each individual will work out for the best interest of the community—a theory foreshadowing nineteenth century capitalism; and the theory, more widespread, which held that what is best for all is also best for each—a theory underlying modern collectivist systems. In one way or the other, the *philosophes* hoped to solve the great problem of human societies: if we accept the *naturalism* of the self-interest reduction, how can we make it coincide with the *rationalism* of self-sacrifice or virtue?

Needless to say, the defenders of the established institutions and dogmas resisted all such interpretations and programs with every means at their disposal. For them, the Christian interpretation of human nature and destiny alone accounted satisfactorily for man's contradictory nature, and alone provided a sure, objective and efficacious ground for moral values and their implementation.12 The tactical error of the conservatives was, in part, to reason and to trade blows, hoping to defeat the proponents of an invincible new scientific movement on their own terms. It was, even more, to give ground, and to try to reconcile their position to the new cry in favor of the "natural" instincts and needs of man, instead of frankly proclaiming an anti-natural aim and basis.

The makers of the Revolution were representatives of the moderate, deistic current, which had won the allegiance of the vast majority of liberals and thinking men, and not of the bolder, more original extremes of materialism, anarchism, or proto-totalitarianism. But it turned out that the pessimists about human nature had been right, after all; that social life is a struggle for self-interest and power; and that to avoid anarchism, the Revolution was obliged to go to the other extreme, and to forge the first model of totalitarian repression and terror. It is not surprising

12 "They thought of man as a being created by God and subject to his judgment, who by his free will was capable of deviating, but whose true object in life was to conform himself to the realm of absolute righteousness from which he had come. . . . *Philosophes*, on the other hand, determined human nature empirically. They emphasized the facts of human behavior. What they perceived clearly in men was not their relationship to an objective world of absolute ends and values, but their actual needs, wants, feelings, inclinations and ideas." (R. R. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 184.)
that Saint-Just, in 1786, wrote a long poem which foreshadows aspects of Sade's outlook. In *L’Organt* we see scorn for reason:

[La raison] n’est qu’un noir composé  
D’orgueil adroit et d’orgueil intéressé . . .  
. . . un grand monstre, appelé Raison  
Cet animal à la tête pointue  
Trois pieds noués et du crin sur la vue.\(^\text{13}\)

Man is an animal: “Il n’est plus que la première bête/De ce séjour dont il se dit le Roi.” And this bestiality is given free expression, in the poem, in the form of what we now know as sadism, the joy of humiliating and inflicting hurt on another human being. We know what Saint-Just’s role was to be.

Like Condorcet, Robespierre, when the Revolution broke, represented the average liberal state of mind on religious, political and moral questions. A provincial lawyer and an intellectual, nourished on the writings of the *philosophes*, he became their spokesman, their definer and their preacher. His wide popularity grew partly out of the fact that he eloquently expressed the assumptions and the goals which the *philosophes* had made the common property of the middle class.

Robespierre considered himself a moralist. The science of politics, he declared to the Convention, is only that of “putting into laws and administration the moral truths found in the books of the philosophers. . . .\(^\text{14}\)” What was this morality? He defined it time and again in his speeches. Men are good or evil according to the direction they give their passions. We must conquer our egoistic passions in order to be good citizens. There are two kinds of self-love: one that is vile, “which seeks an exclusive well-being, purchased by the unhappiness of others; the other, generous, *bien-faisant*, which fuses our happiness with the happiness of all. . . .” These, and similar theories, we are by now well acquainted with. It was this Robespierre who, in 1791, demanded the abolition of the death penalty, as “essentially unjust” and as completely ineffective, “multiplying crimes rather than preventing them.” Here is the heart of his plea: “Listen to the voice of justice and of reason; it cries to us that human judgments are never

\(^{13}\) The quotations are taken from Ollivier, *Saint-Just et la force des choses*, p. 47.  
Culminations

sure enough so that society can put to death a man condemned by other men who are subject to error." 15 And, even in 1792, he fulminated wrathfully against the "frightful doctrine of denunciation," warning the delegates not to raise a temple to fear. 16

Let us glance at the origins of some of Robespierre's political ideas. From Montesquieu, he took the theory of representation and the definition of virtue in a republic. He declared that the Legislative Assembly represents "the essence of sovereignty" and was the highest power. 17 Virtue, he held, is love of the republic and of the general welfare, above all things; a love that will assure purity of morals. Rousseau gave him the doctrines of the social contract and of the general will. In the article, "Political Economy," Rousseau had written, "the general will is also the most just, and the voice of the people is indirectly the voice of God." Robespierre proclaimed time and again that the people were sovereign, that the State is a collective moral and political body, with absolute power over the individual. It is a common self, a single will: "the sovereign is above the laws." 18 The sovereign must dominate all individual wills. The goal of the social contract will thus be attained; men are to be submitted to their own wills, in such a way that Rousseau's dictum, "each uniting with all will nevertheless obey only himself," may come true. For already, in Rousseau, we see the merging of private and public interest turning into the same patriotic or nationalistic idea of the good citizen which the Revolution, and Robespierre in particular, were to consider its essential form.

Montesquieu and Rousseau had both stressed conditioning by a national system of education. Rousseau had written, "It is not enough to say to the citizen 'be good.' He must be taught to be so. . . . It is education which ought to stamp on the soul of your citizens the print of their nationality and so guide their tastes and opinions that by inclination, by passion, by necessity, they will be patriots." 19 This was precisely the declared aim of the system of national education instituted by Robespierre. As he said, "The people will become easier to lead as the human mind

15 Ibid., p. 299-300.
16 Ibid., p. 351.
17 Deymes, Les doctrines politiques de Robespierre, p. 167.
18 Ibid., p. 23.
acquires greater activity, light and philosophy.”  

His hope was to “regenerate the nation,” to make a “new people.” Children, from the age of five, were to belong to the nation. Here it can be seen again that education, as the word was used by such eighteenth century writers, is not to be taken as a synonym of enlightenment, but is to be referred to its etymological meaning.

From Mably, Robespierre took the theory of a single legislative chamber, and the belief that the executive, necessarily the enemy of the legislative branch, must be submitted to it. Like Mably, Robespierre emphasized equality above all else, but as a bourgeois, did not dare to apply it to the distribution of wealth. He followed sound “philosophic” doctrine: the right of property is sacred, within vague limits of social responsibility. Extreme disproportion of fortune “is the source of many evils and many crimes,” but equality is a chimera.

Robespierre carried to totalitarian limits the process of conditioning that was implicit in some of the philosophes' theories, and furnished a model for modern collectivist systems. He caused popular clubs to be founded throughout France, in which, by speeches, songs and discussions, ideas and emotions could be manipulated and men trained to self-sacrifice for the public weal. His government sent “commissioners” throughout the land, to “propagate public spirit, watch over the enemies of the Republic, and establish Jacobin clubs. . . .” He realized fully the power of the press, and insisted on effective propaganda, through that medium, in the theatre, and in the other arts. Following Rousseau again, censorship was established. “All journalists who opposed his ideas were labeled as unpatriotic ‘impostors’ and hence to be suppressed.”

In an early speech Robespierre had said, “We must speak to the people in the language of justice and reason.” He proclaimed the absolute power of the legislature as the will of the nation,

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22 Eagan, p. 86.
23 Ibid., p. 86-88. “Propaganda became a means of education, both at home and abroad, while the press and the stage became mere tools of the government and were forced to be patriotic. Robespierre envisioned a cultural society completely dominated by the State.”
24 Ibid., p. 84.
25 Discours, in Oeuvres, vi, 49.
saying that “it must necessarily have its sacred authority, superior to any individual will.” 26 The development and happiness of the individual, Robespierre assured the nation, was the purpose of society. “The only way to reach that goal is the agreement of private interest and general interest.” 27 No philosophe had ever said it better. 

But all this was to change:

Robespierre the humanitarian, liberal patriot and politician would have shuddered at the thought of an authoritarian or totalitarian state. Such a system of government would crush the very liberty and equality which he had argued for at such great length. This seemingly firm belief in the virtues of democracy and republicanism would hardly seem compatible with a nationalist dictatorship. Yet, in the brief period from 1789 to 1794, Robespierre turned from a liberal humanitarian pacifist into a nationalistic zealot eager to include all political, social and economic power within the state. 28

The effective causes of this change were, of course, political and economic, and all who know the history of that stormy time are familiar with them. However, these causes might not have produced the same effects had Robespierre’s ideology been different. The eighteenth century writers had announced themselves as moralists, and so did Robespierre. But, as we shall see (and have already glimpsed), it was a morality whose basis was social utility, and not ethical principle; or, to be exact, it made of utility, social and individual, the chief moral principle. Furthermore, a philosophy of totalitarianism was implicit in a political doctrine whose basic tenet was that the collective will was everything. A later day was to reveal even more fully what Niebuhr has called “the demonic fury of fascist politics in which a collective will expresses boundless ambitions,” and which testifies to the result of surrender to the collectivity, as the means of securing individual happiness. As the deputy Courtois wrote in 1795, “they were killing individual happiness to create public happiness.”

History shows us that in all such situations, the governing party, or group, and most particularly its leader, assumes that it

26 Ibid., p. 87.
27 Deymes, p. 50.
(or he) is the true expression of the collective will. All opponents are "mistaken," and are "enemies," if they persist. All must be conditioned to recognize the popular will, which is really the will which the leaders assert. They must be "forced to be free." Thus power, starting with a process of rationalization and continuing with one of persuasion, reaches the use of force and finally terminates in terror. Never did Robespierre doubt that he represented the true will of the people. In this way, Rousseau's great "solution" for the social-political problem, submission of the individual will to the general will only (that is, abstractly, to itself), instead of to another individual or to a group, turned out, in practice, to be illusory and self-defeating. At the same time, this course of events also proved again the general truth, that the will-to-power never fails to justify itself in moral terms and to claim the sanctity of pure principles; and the eighteenth century, which understood the egoistic corruption of ideals, might not have been unprepared for this. Twentieth century analogies are obvious. In particular, in our own time we see once more how such epithets as "capitalist conspiracy" or "communist conspiracy" tend to take on ever wider applications until they become identified with all opposition to those who hold power.

It is not surprising, then, that in 1793, only four years after the outbreak, Robespierre declares, "The people are sublime, but individuals are weak . . . There must be a center of operations. The people as a whole cannot govern itself." All who oppose him are now traitors and conspirators, enemies of the people, and must be exterminated. Justice, whose sacred standard Robespierre had raised from the first days of the Revolution, becomes converted into a mockery far more cruel than anything that had existed under the Old Régime. The death penalty is now the order of the day. In 1788 Robespierre had said that relationship to a criminal was no crime; five years later, he guillotines not only a young woman suspected of wishing to assassinate him, but also all her relations. When Marat is slain, Robespierre seizes upon that incident to wipe out the Girondists, on the pretext that they are in sympathy with it. Like the aristocrats, Danton and his group

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29 Each of the many factions, at the end of 1793, were "denouncing their enemies as false patriots, and all asserting their identity with the people." (Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, p. 255.)

30 Eagan, p. 93.
are denied a fair trial. There are no proofs, and no evidence; they are even denied the right of self-defense, on the grounds that conspirators against the people have insulted national justice.

This, too, was logical. The safety of the people overrides all purely moral considerations. Rules relating to the treatment of individuals must be determined by social utility, by the general will, to which, according to Rousseau's doctrine, each individual has surrendered himself entirely, with all the rights which he had in the state of nature. Since the end—the general welfare—determines and justifies the means, conspirators must be exterminated even without individual responsibility, or absolute proof of guilt. They must be cut off, as we cut off a gangrened limb to save the body. Society cannot help its necessary wrath; and the ill results of their behavior, regardless of all else, make them responsible. How many philosophes had proclaimed just that moral doctrine in the free will controversy, over three long generations of disputation?

Burke's rational analysis—despite the distortions of his fanatical prejudice—does uncover some basic truths. "On this scheme of things," he writes, "a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. . . . The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father, are only common homicide; and if the people are by any chance, or in any way, gainers by it, a sort of homicide much the most pardonable. . . ." Burke goes on to describe "a principal actor weighing . . . so much actual crime against so much contingent advantage. . . . In the theatre, the first intuitive glance, without any elaborate process of reasoning, will show, that this method of political computation would justify every extent of crime. . . . Justifying perfidy and murder for public benefit, public benefit would soon become the pretext, and perfidy and murder the end, until rapacity, malice, revenge, and fear more dreadful than revenge, could satiate their insatiable appetites." (Reflections . . ., p. 74, 78–79.)

In the totalitarian view, according to Hans Morgenthau, the discrepancy between morality and reality is sidestepped. The state is the source or manifestation of morality, and "whatever it does in the name of the state partakes of the ethical dignity emanating from it." The state is the repository of the common good, consequently its ends justify all means. (Scientific Man . . ., p. 4, 7). Following Professor Morgenthau's analysis, we should have to say that the philosophes did not realize that political action and doing evil are inevitably linked; an act cannot conform both to the rules of the political art, which are those of power and success, and to those of ethics.

The perversion of justice was described with cold irony by the marquis de Sade, who had himself experienced it. "The regime of despotism had created a judicial truth which was not moral and natural truth . . . evidence did not have the right to convince without witnesses or written proofs. . . . The indulgent counter-revolutionaries tried to subject national justice and the course of the revolution to these rules. . . . Everything was working to soften justice or make it go astray. . . . There was no surprise when shameless women asked that liberty be sacrificed to their family, their husbands, their friends. . . . The result has been that never has national justice shown the imposing attitude, or displayed the energy proper to it;
And so, Robespierre, who wanted to make private interest agree with public interest, found (as Morelly had tacitly assumed, and as Le Franc de Pompignan had forewarned) that it could be done only by absolute conditioning and repression—that is, by the crushing of private interest. The "language of justice and reason" became the language of terror and death. The submission of the executive to *vox populi vox dei* was reversed. Freedom of the press and of assembly, which Robespierre had announced as basic, became freedom only for those who spoke for the people, not for their "enemies." Whole classes were "vilified, intimidated, hunted." 32 Camille Desmoulins, in the *Vieux Cordelier,* "drew a gripping picture of society under the Caesars, a society driven frantic by suspicion, uncertainty, fear, delation, duplicity and violence." 33 But Robespierre, five years after the Bastille, was still the idealist, and still refused to accept, like so many others, disillusion. He still insisted on principle, still hoped to purge the nation of vice, hypocrisy and egotism. His theory was, as before, the liberalism of constitutional government and of individual rights, as he declares it in his speech of 5 Nivôse. 34 He was not acting under the pressure of circumstances only. His speech of February 5, 1794 makes clear that he still hoped (in his own words) "to make good the promises of philosophy." He was still, as R. R. Palmer expresses it, the "child of the Enlightenment." 35 His error was, at least in part, to ignore the evil in human nature, that we have seemed to pride ourselves on being just to individuals without worrying overmuch about being just to the republic. . . . The life of scoundrels here is balanced with that of the people; here . . . every indulgent or superfluous formality is a public danger. The delay in punishing the enemies of the republic should never be longer than the time it takes to recognize them. . . . Indulgence towards them is atrocious; clemency is parricide." (G. Lely, *Vie du marquis de Sade,* ii, 467-468.) Lely quotes several articles of a Revolutionary decree, including the following:

"Art. ix. Every citizen has the right to seize and to hail before the magistrates conspirators and counter-revolutionaries. He is required to denounce them as soon as he knows them.

Art. xvi. The law gives calumniated patriots patriotic jurors as defenders; it gives none to conspirators."

Obviously, judgment was pronounced before trial. Sade himself was condemned to the guillotine in 1794 for having volunteered in 1791 for service in the Garde constitutionnelle established by the Assemblée nationale. Death was also decreed on suspicion of thinking wrongly.

32 Palmer, p. 254.
33 Ibid., p. 259.
34 Ibid., p. 264.
and not to realize how much coercion and conditioning would be required to attain his ends—a measure so great, that the humanity of human beings would be destroyed.

One of the most interesting episodes of the Revolution was the declaration of the Festival of the Supreme Being. Robespierre was not likely to neglect what Rousseau had so strongly emphasized, the establishment of a State religion to repress anti-social behavior. He knew, too, the importance of spectacles and of what we today would call mass demonstrations. The State religion was proposed in 1794. Robespierre explained what it was to do, in terms that will sound familiar:

The masterwork of society would be to create in it a quick instinct for moral things which, without the tardy help of reason, would lead him to do good and avoid evil; for the individual reason of each man, bewildered by his passions, is only a sophist which pleads their cause, and the authority of man can always be attacked by the *amour-propre* of man. Now what produces or replaces this precious instinct, what supplements the insufficiency of human authority, is the religious feeling imprinted in our hearts by the sanction given to the precepts of morality by a power superior to man: thus I am not aware of any legislator who thought of establishing national atheism.36

The tenets of the new religion emphasized belief in a Supreme Being and a religion of social duties. Its cult consisted of mass festivals and dedications—less to the proclaimed Goddess of Reason than to the nation. Before the Convention Robespierre denounced atheism, on grounds of utility that recall the debate which ran throughout the eighteenth century: atheism leads to crime and vice; the belief in God and immortality is "a continual reminder to be just."

But are the existence of God and immortality truths? This is not important, to Robespierre. "Eh! How could these ideas not be truths? At least I cannot conceive how nature could have suggested to man fictions that are more useful than all realities, and if the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were only dreams, they would still be the most beautiful of all the concepts of the human mind." 37

36 Stephens, p. 402. See Rousseau, *Contrat social*, Bk. IV, ch. 8. The example of Soviet Russia has lately disproven Robespierre's last assertion.
37 Ibid., p. 400–401.
All this was not only Rousseau's doctrine; it was that of Voltaire, d'Alembert and many many others. The right and the true are identified with, or replaced by the socially useful. Had not Mably written, “If the truth is always useful, atheism is then not true”? Here we see the danger of the philosophes' identification of the true and the useful; while they had often declared that all truth is useful, it is only too easy to reverse the equation, and declare false and iniquitous whatever impedes the chosen end.

It is not surprising, then, that the Religion of Reason became, in the hands of Robespierre, the worship of the nation and the particular protector of the Jacobin régime, and of himself. He declared himself, in fact, to be under the protection of the “Eternal Author of Things” and of his providence. Crimes and assassination threats were punished in the name of that Being. “Worship of the Supreme Being had become fanatical, the very crime with which it had charged Catholicism.”

The cruelty and bloodthirstiness of the Terror were due to revolutionary dynamics, not to any ideas of the philosophes, as the Reaction later charged. Yet there was a logical, though not a necessary connection which made the development easier intellectually. The ideas of the Enlightenment were part of the context in which the Revolution evolved. In the revolutionary crises, certain extreme possibilities which those ideas contained, and which were not apparent under other conditions, were summoned forth; and the very failure of the moderate approach, which the creators of those ideas had in mind, is significant.

The logical outcome is partly revealed, mostly after the fact, in Sade's writings; the Revolution had already made it real. “We must attribute to Sade,” writes Paul Klossowski, “the role of denouncer of the obscure forces camouflaged as social values by the defense mechanisms of the collectivity. Thus camouflaged, these social values can whirl in their infernal dance.”

“...If man, slave and torturer...” comments Georges Lely, “had been willing to peer into the atrocious possibilities that his nature contains, and which our author, first, had the lucidity to conceive and the courage to

88 Oeuvres, ix, 408.
89 For a fuller discussion of this problem, see my article, “The Problem of Truth and Falsehood,” especially p. 601 ff.
40 Eagan, p. 176.
41 Sade mon prochain, quoted by Lely, op. cit., II, 522.
reveal, perhaps the unspeakable period of 1933 to 1945 might not have come to brand forever the character of the human race.” To this we must add that what Sade lay bare with a merciless lucidity utterly unknown before him had at least been pointed to in some of the earlier eighteenth century analysis of human nature. This we have had ample occasion to observe.

The ethical doctrine which the *philosophes* proposed to substitute for objective imperatives cut away both the metaphysical and the moral supports from under itself. By affirming what they perceived to be man’s true place in the universe, they loosed the metaphysical moorings and set him adrift. In a piece in *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, “Frenchmen, one further effort if you wish to be republicans,” Sade—who was always, regardless of his own errors, the destroyer of human self-delusion and self-blindness—showed that the republic was founded on the murder of Louis XVI, a king ruling by divine right. It was God who was guillotined on January 21, 1793. For Sade this meant that there was no longer any right to forbid crime and evil instincts, or to prevent his proposed universal society of crime. It was the monarchy that had maintained the idea of God, as the support for laws. Sade goes on to justify calumny, theft and murder, and to demand that they be tolerated.

The *philosophes* had drawn no such conclusion, though a few perceived the danger of it. They believed that ethics can and should be independent of the supernatural. Its necessity and justification, both natural and rational, lay within human life itself. Unfortunately, as we shall later see in more detail, the moral support for ethics was also weakened, as a result of their analysis of human nature and their selected norms of value. They relied on self-interest, on the private and public utility, which they hoped to reconcile in a reconstructed society.

All of their hopes were to fail. The perfect social order could never be created, precisely because of the self-interest and the drive for power which they had understood so well. We have seen where the methods of conditioning and repression were to lead. And rationality, which they themselves so often doubted, was not to govern men’s actions. The history of the Western world since the French Revolution bears ample witness to the truth of

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42 The phrase is that of Camus, in *L’homme révolté*, p. 58.
this analysis. The evidence is written in the minds of the men who came after the eighteenth century, in their continuing doubts, in the increasing confusion and pessimism that envelops them, as well as in the crimes and follies of history. It would be absurd, as I have said, to cast any responsibility on the philosophes for the complex circumstances which determined later happenings. They cleaned out the débris of the past and unblocked the roads to the future. They did not succeed in showing men the path to a new way of life, as they had hoped, nor in solving the problem which they helped to bring to a new crisis: the moral and political problem of the relations between individuals in a community, and between the individual and the community. But they took a fateful step forward, one which mankind, in the process of its growth, had to take. In so doing, they left a heritage for the future, both precious and dangerous. The old structure was forever broken. Mankind had to create a new one. The one they dreamed of, to put in its place, was built on faith in human potentialities, and on love for their fellow men. We know now what has happened to this glorious hope, which even then covered a basic pessimism about men themselves. When it crashed and burst, and the smoke of illusion was dissipated, all that remained was the pessimism, exacerbated by the Freudian psychology, intensified by an increased awareness of the metaphysical emptiness which the eighteenth century had indeed experienced, but from which it hoped to escape through an independent, humanistic affirmation.

History, and particularly the contemporary state of mind, as we observe it in our politics, literature and arts, show that the rationalistic solutions of the middle ground have not succeeded, and have lost their formerly powerful appeal. We are impelled to extremes—to those of Sade, of Morelly, of Kant, or of the Grand Inquisitor—towards absolutes of some kind. This is to say that today we are still engaged in the same struggles. Only the shadow of despair has grown deeper, and the conflict, more desperate, has entered into the concrete arena of politics and life. The liberals and rationalists of our own time—the true children of the philosophes—still hope for a reasonable and a secular solution to the problems of the individual and society. They are beset, more critically than before, by the two opposing forces which were their enemies in the eighteenth century crisis. Many,
appalled by the failure of reason, seek refuge within the safe
citadel of the supernatural, which points to the lesson of history
for its justification. Many others, indeed, whole nations, for whom
science is the inescapable force controlling the future, brush aside
that citadel as one that is untenable and, in fact, already fallen.
Embracing the nihilism, the philosophy of the absurd that was
one child of the Enlightenment, they rebel against rationalism
and objective standards, in the arts and in politics, in law and in
morals, drift in aimless despair, in the liberal West, or follow
some philosophy of naked power and amoral scientism. But the
problems are the same as those we have discussed, and those we
shall later examine: our existence, the nature of man, the organi­
zation of society and the integration of the individual within it,
the direction of a moral life in a creature whom Pascal rightly
understood as a monster of contradiction. And even though the
failure of the philosophes to solve the moral and social problem
is historically attested, other men will go on, avoiding both ex­
tremes of absolutism and nihilism, and continue to strive for a
rational, humane way of life. The eighteenth century posed the
problems. We are still groping for the solutions.

It was, clearly enough, an age of crisis. But the crisis was not
only of that age. It was the crisis of man. Of man, who discovered
his strangeness and his frustration in a world not made for him,
a universe he has passed beyond in moral value, but which an­
nihilates him and all his work. Man, the only dissatisfied animal,
who must pay the penalty for his freedom and his intelligence,
and strive ever onward into unsafe regions where, perhaps, he
cannot live. Man, the only tragic being, because he would be
more than he is, more, perhaps, than he can be.