IN A PRESS RELEASE drafted for the first American production of *Major Barbara* in 1915, Shaw called this comedy the third of three plays—the others being *Man and Superman* (1902) and *John Bull’s Other Island*—“of exceptional weight and magnitude on which the reputation of the author as a serious dramatist was first established, and still mainly rests.” In a letter to Siegfried Trebitsch, his German translator, written four years later, he referred to them as “the Big Three” and suggested that his German publisher bring them out in one edition, which “had better be called Comedies of Science and Religion or something of that sort.…” As I have demonstrated elsewhere, although not in terms of slavery to duty and tricks of the governing class, one might consider these plays to represent a trilogy that deals with and develops a set of themes. While no evidence exists that Shaw intended to follow *Man and Superman* with developments of its thematic implications or a culmination of them, which one might consider *Major Barbara* to be, he nevertheless, perhaps unconsciously, did so partly because of two factors: the composition of a preface, written after he completed a play, points to the play he wrote next; and his direction of a revival of one of these plays either overlapped with his composition of another or they followed in close proximity. For example, he paused while writing the second act of *Major Barbara* in order to focus his energies on directing a revival of *John Bull’s Other Island* and then prepared to direct a revival of *Man and Superman*, after which, with both plays fresh in his mind, he returned to *Major Barbara* to complete it. He himself was aware of the relationship of *Major Barbara* to these earlier plays, comparing it to a longer version of the last act of *John Bull’s Other Island* and calling the protagonist of *Man and Superman* “Euripides,” which is the nickname of an important character in *Major Barbara*.

When Shaw wrote *Man and Superman*, his mammoth and at the time most ambitious play, he had no indication it would be produced. He was quite frank about its difficulties or even suitability for performance under current theatre conditions. Even before he started to write it, he recognized that it would be “an immense play, but not for the stage of this generation.” When he published it in 1903 he thrust into his three-act play what he frankly admitted was “a perfectly extraneous act” (which became the third act, the
previous one turning into the fourth) in which his protagonist dreams that in the guise of his mythic ancestor Don Juan, and more specifically Mozart’s Don Giovanni, he is in Hell, where he “philosophizes at great length in a Shavio-Socratic dialogue with the lady, the statue, and the devil.”

He also flung into the mixture a prefatory epistle dedicatory and, as an appendix, a book by its chief character, *The Revolutionist’s Handbook and Pocket Companion*. Flaunting his audacity, he admitted that if anyone were to claim that the hero’s dream is unsuitable “for immediate production at a popular theatre we need not contradict him…. As for me, what I have always wanted is a pit of philosophers; and this is a play for such a pit.”

Some might call *Man and Superman* a talkfest, but even if they did not, it is certainly far more discursive than any play he had previously written. The productions under the management of John E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker at the Court Theatre, where he was the house playwright and where he was assured his plays would be produced, would not begin until the year after he published this play. In the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court from 1904 through 1907, he found a theatre where he and Barker could direct his comedies of ideas, and actors, including Barker, who could perform them, thereby attracting audiences who delighted in them. His next two major plays would be, if one leaves aside the Hell scene, even more discursive than *Man and Superman* and, as such, dramatically charged and theatrically vivid. “No doubt I must recognize, as even the Ancient Mariner did,” he cheerfully admitted, “that I must tell my story entertainingly if I am to hold the wedding guests spellbound in spite of the siren sounds of the loud bassoon.” And he did. In the plays he wrote for the Court Theatre seasons—to which the frame play of *Man and Superman* was added, and later, in a separate series of matinées, the Hell scene—as well as in his plays that followed, Shaw was free to depart further than the commercial plays of his day. He may not have found a pit of philosophers, but he attracted theatregoers who delighted in his comic dramatizations of what he and they considered philosophical issues. This is not to say that he abandoned the themes of slavery to or revolt against duty, and tricks of the governing class. To the contrary, in these plays he expanded his treatment of them.

**Man and Superman**

Napoleon says that every Englishman acts in his self-interest after he has a burning conviction that it is his duty to do so. Going further than to call Ann Whitefield, the chief female character of *Man and Superman*, an exemplar of an Englishwoman, Shaw, in his preface to the play, declares that since there is an Everyman, the title character of a medieval play, there should also be an Everywoman. “Ann is Everywoman.” Although she does not call her
firmly held conviction that she should have what she wants—Jack Tanner as her husband and the father of her children—either moral or religious, she considers using any means to achieve that end to be her duty. By formulating Ann as Everywoman, Shaw gives a metaphysical dimension to the English conception of duty.

Undeniably, she uses duty as an excuse to get what she wants. After Roe-buck Ramsden, who complains that Jack, whose radical views he considers immoral, sees her frequently without others being present, he asks what Jack’s friend Octavius intends to do about it. Octavius explains that “Ann herself has told Jack that whatever his opinions are, he will always be welcome because he knew her dear father.” Completely “out of patience,” Ramsden cries, “That girl’s mad about her duty to her parents.” It soon turns out that her late father’s will appoints both Ramsden and Tanner as her joint guardians, which displeases both men—Ramsden because he disapproves of Jack’s possible influence on her, and Jack because he understands her better than Ramsden does: “She’ll commit every crime a respectable woman can; and she’ll justify every one of them by saying that it was the wish of her guardians. She’ll put everything on us; and we shall have no more control over her than a couple of mice over a cat.”

When Ann arrives, she bears out Jack’s contention that they will have no control over her. Does she approve of her father’s choice of joint guardians? “It is not for me to approve or disapprove. I accept it. My father loved me and knew best what was good for me.” Suppose one guardian forbids her to read Jack’s book *The Revolutionist’s Handbook and Pocket Companion*, which Ramsden does, and the other orders her to read it, which Jack does? “What about your duty to me?” asks Jack. Her answer: “I am sure you would never purposely force me into a painful dilemma, Jack.” Ramsden “irritably” presses her to choose. “I feel that I am too young, too inexperienced, to decide. My father’s wishes are sacred to me.” When they give up trying to assert their authority, she settles the matter “with subdued but gushing delight.” “Then we are all agreed; and my dear father’s will is to be carried out.” Even though Ann does not explicitly invoke duty in this passage, she wins her argument to dutifully obey her father’s will.

The next time the conception of duty arises it is explicit. Almost everyone supposes that the play’s other young female character, Octavius’s pregnant sister Violet, is unmarried (only Ann knows she is secretly married). Jack, who offers her sanctuary and money, assumes that Ramsden will perform the social duty of ostracizing her and, characteristically, erupts indignant-ly: “Go and do your miserable duty, Ramsden. Hunt her out into the street. Cleanse your threshold from her contamination. Vindicate the purity of your
English home.” Although neither Ramsden nor Octavius has any intention of behaving that way, Octavius demands, with Ramsden’s approval, that the father of her child “make reparations”—that is, fulfill his duty—“by marrying her,” or else “he shall answer for it to me.” Ironically, Jack concludes that they want to marry Violet “to a damned scoundrel by way of reforming her character!” As Tanner tells Octavius, helping his sister is “against your conscience; but still you'll do it.” So will Ramsden, who links duty to morality, demanding of Tanner: “And Morality, sir? What is to become of that?” Tanner ripostes, “Morality can go to its father the devil”

Alone, Jack and Ann reminisce about when they were children and he told her his youthful secrets, some of them touched up for the telling. On the one occasion he told her the truth, he reminds her, she threatened to expose him. He started a love affair with Rachel Rosetree, whom he met in a garden and with whom he “walked about very uncomfortably with our arms round one another, and kissed at parting, and were most conscientiously romantic.” Once he told Ann of his romance with Rachel, she ensured that Rachel discontinued it.

TANNERR... You went to her and held the guilty secret over her head, leading her a life of abject terror and humiliation by threatening to tell on her.

ANN. And a very good thing for her, too. It was my duty to stop her misconduct; and she is thankful to me for it now.

TANNER. Is she?

ANN. She ought to be at all events.

TANNER. It was not your duty to stop my misconduct, I suppose.

ANN. I did stop it by stopping her.

TANNER. Are you sure of that? You stopped my telling you about my adventures; but how do you know that you stopped the adventures?

Jack plainly states that Ann acquired “a moral duty to chastise and reform Rachel,” which as Napoleon might say involved a deep conviction that she held the ethical and righteous responsibility to subjugate the girl who had what she wanted, which she did. Since she had the knowledge, she had the power, which she used as what Undershaft calls a trick of the governing class.

In the second act, while waiting for Ann’s sister, Rhoda, whom Jack Tanner’s chauffeur Enry was to take for a drive with him and Ann, Tanner receives a letter from Rhoda, telling him that Ann forbade her to go with him. Arriving too late, Ann tells Jack that Rhoda could not come. Besotted with Ann, Octavius tells her to disregard Jack’s objection to her lie: “You were right—quite right. Ann was only doing her duty, Jack; and you know
it. Doing it in the kindest way, too.” What Octavius perceives as duty is a lie designed to enable Ann to be with the man she wants without another woman to distract him. When she is alone with Jack, she uses a different lie to cover up the first: her mother made her do it, and it was her implicit duty to obey her mother. Foolishly, Jack, who should know better, believes her and begins “working himself up into a sociological rage” against the tyranny of parents. Upon the arrival of Ann’s and Rhoda’s mother, who innocently remarks that she would like him to take both of her daughters for a drive, Jack realizes that he has been duped by Ann’s invocation of filial duty.

The scene in Hell (Act III) contains several references to duty. Doña Ana insists it was her duty to scream when her father dueled with Don Juan, and she admits she was such a slave of duty that she confessed to more sins than she committed. She is appalled when Juan tells her that her presence in Hell is the reward of her having been dutiful on earth and when Juan calls duty one of the seven deadly virtues. Thereafter, the play contains no more overt uses of the word duty, although Ann is sufficiently clear that duty is her motive. In the last act, she continues to indicate what she and Jack had indicated earlier, that she will do what she wants in the name of filial duty. “You know that my mother is determined that I shall marry Jack,” she tells Octavius, and “it’s clear from my father’s will that he wished me to marry Jack.” She is unambiguous about her stratagem: “The only really simple thing is to go straight for what you want and grab it.”

A member of the English governing class, Ann is not a slave of duty. Rather, as an EveryEnglishwoman in fact though not in name, duty is one of her tactics. She consciously and persistently uses the conception of duty and her need to follow it as means to achieve her goal, marriage to a specific member of the English governing class.

John Bull’s Other Island

Broadbent, the protagonist of John Bull’s Other Island, is an archetype of the Englishman described by Napoleon. When he wants what is in his economic interest, he acquires a fervent and overwhelming belief that it is his moral duty to obtain it, which he steadfastly strives to do. Aiming to become a member of parliament, which is charged with obligations that include governing Ireland, he is convinced that it is his duty to be elected and he tries to trick others into believing that it is in their best interest, if not their duty, to help him to become an M.P.

At the start of the play he is preparing to go to Ireland to foreclose a property owned by his land development syndicate and to develop an estate there. However, the first time he announces why he is going he does not give this reason; rather, he cites duty as his motive. After what he calls the
enslavement and destruction of South Africa—that is, the signing of a peace treaty between the British and the two allied Boer republics two years earlier, ending the Second Boer War and annexing these republics, which would become the Union of South Africa, to the British Empire—Broadbent proclaims that the only remaining country in which he could be interested is Ireland. No sane man, he proclaims, could deny that the first duty of an Englishman is to Ireland. “Unfortunately, we have politicians here more unscrupulous than Bobrikoff, more bloodthirsty than Abdul the Damned; and it is under their heel that Ireland is now writhing.”

Although he does not at this point expect it, he will fulfill what he is convinced is an Englishman’s first duty. In addition, his subsequent actions suggest he will become a politician as unscrupulous as the Russian General Nikolay Ivanovich Bobrikoff, whom in 1903 Czar Nicholas II gave dictatorial powers over Finland, where he was assassinated on 16 June—the day before Shaw started to write *John Bull’s Other Island*—and as cruel in his own way as Sultan Abdul Hamid II, ruler of the Ottoman Empire, who beginning a decade earlier committed extensive atrocities against the Armenians. Ironically, despite what this paragraph may suggest, Shaw does not portray Broadbent as an odious villain but as a likable, richly textured comic character for whom a saintly priest, who sees through his schemes, admits he might even vote.

Broadbent is filled with the conviction, which is part of his duty to Ireland, that the only requirement to make his development plan profitable is to conduct it “properly, as estates are handled in England.” When Broadbent asks if Tim Haffigan knows what the English plan is, Tim replies instantly: “Take all you can out of Ireland and spend it in England: thats it.” Uncomfortable with this view of the English, Broadbent tries to correct him by explaining that his plan is to take money out of England and to spend it in Ireland. As matters develop, both men are right. Broadbent will arrange for a small amount of money to be taken from England to be invested in Ireland and a great deal of money to be taken from Ireland to be given to his syndicate.

Inadvertently foreshadowing one of his later actions, Broadbent announces to his partner, Larry Doyle, “All the capable people in Ireland are of English extraction” and “Home Rule will work wonders under English guidance.” When Broadbent becomes a candidate for the Rosscullen seat in parliament, he may be in a position to assist in such guidance. Never dreaming that he is describing himself, he sincerely and with comic effect denounces “the windbags, the carpet-baggers, the charlatans,” as well as “the fools and ignoramuses who corrupt the multitude by their wealth, or seduce them by spouting balderdash to them”; and he calls himself, by contrast, “an Englishman with no humbug about him, who will talk straight
common sense and take his stand on the solid ground of principle and public
duty....” To Father Keegan’s remark that when he was young and ignorant
he would have called Broadbent a hypocrite, Broadbent laboriously denies
this accusation: “If there is a vice I detest—or against which my whole pub-
lic life has been a protest—it is the vice of hypocrisy. I would almost rather
be inconsistent than insincere.” Keegan issues an ironic apology: “I know
that you are quite sincere. There is a saying in the Scripture which runs—so
far as the memory of an oldish man can carry the words—Let not the right
side of your brain know what the left side doeth. I learnt at Oxford that this
is the secret of the Englishman’s strange power of making the best of both
worlds.”

Related to Broadbent’s passionate belief that it is his duty to get what he
wants is his innocent certainty that no one is entitled to refuse to give it to
him. Thus, when Nora Reilly suggests she might reject his proposal of mar-
rriage, he develops “a childish rage” and cries, “(In despair) I cant help your
refusing. I’m helpless: I can do nothing. You have no right to ruin my whole
life. You—(a hysterical convulsion stops him).” His ardor virtually shocks
her into accepting him. Thus, whereas Ibsen’s Nora leaves her husband at
the end of the play, Shaw’s Nora acquires one, who even before they marry
orders her what to do.

Accurately, Keegan addresses Broadbent as “The conquering English-
man,” since in one day he has “carried off our only heiress, and practic-
ally secured the parliamentary seat.” Keegan might have added, as he later
emphasizes, that Broadbent will also acquire financial control of Rosscullen,
which is his duty to do in behalf of his land development syndicate, for the
benefit of which, as he makes clear at the start of the play, he goes to Ross-
cullen in the first place. Broadbent confides to Keegan that “to all intents
and purposes the syndicate I represent already owns half Rosscullen.” The
taverns and breweries “are in the syndicate,” which will also, in less than a
month, hold mortgages on most of the properties owned by small landown-
ers. His partner Larry explains: “We will lend every one of these men half as
much again on their land as it is worth, or ever can be worth, to t h e m.”
The result, it is later disclosed, is that the landowners will be unable to pay
their mortgages, whereupon their property will pass to Broadbent’s syndi-
cate, which will develop it as a tourist resort.

Some of them may get jobs as foremen for the syndicate, slave-driv-
ing workers whom they oversee; others—too old at forty to be fit even for
unskilled labor—will perhaps immigrate to America; and others will be
forced into the squalid conditions of the workhouse dole. “Poor lost soul,”
says Keegan of one of these men, “so cunningly fenced in with invisible
bars!” A “perfectly respectable body of responsible men of good position,” which Broadbent calls the officials of the syndicate, the organization nevertheless has, Larry unashamedly admits, no conscience whatever: “It will use your patriotic blatherskite and balderdash to get parliamentary powers over you as cynically as it would bait a mousetrap with toasted cheese.” Before the real estate is developed as a tourist resort, Keegan perceives, it will foreclose the mortgages of the present landowners; afterward, the tourist hotel and adjacent properties will become insolvent, whereupon the syndicate will arrange their liquidation, reorganize the business, liquidate its second bankruptcy, ruin its original stockholders, and gain an enormous profit by buying the resort for a few shillings per pound. The area will become “a busy mint in which we shall all slave to make money for you.…”25 In short, the syndicate’s actions to acquire property and to use power for its economic interests are among what Undershaft calls tricks of the governing class.

**Major Barbara**

In her dialogue with her son Stephen in the first scene of *Major Barbara*, Lady Britomart makes it clear that she is a member of the governing class: “It is only in the middle classes, Stephen, that people get into a state of dumb helpless horror when they find that there are wicked people in the world. In our class, we have to decide what is to be done with wicked people; and nothing should disturb our self-possession.” She does not regard what members of her class do as tricks, and although neither she nor her son uses the word duty, it underlies their conviction that, in Stephen’s pronouncement, “Right is right; and wrong is wrong; and if a man cannot distinguish them properly, he is either a fool or a rascal,” a sentiment that gains her maternal approval: “That’s my own boy (she pats his cheek)!”26 As neither admits, right and wrong are determined by what benefits them as individuals and as members of a social class.

Because the Salvation Army feeds the unemployed, the poor are in its debt and must conduct themselves at the Army’s meetings by confessing to their sinful deeds before the Army saved them. In this sense they are slaves of the duty required by their apparent saviors. For its part, the Army needs such confessions in order to obtain money to do its work, in which its members sincerely believe, and its meetings fulfill its duty to those who support it—not only individuals who donate small amounts of money, but more importantly wealthy people who are members of the governing class and who require the Army to help keep the poor in their place. As Rummy Mitchens expresses these matters to Snobby Price, “Them Salvation lasses is dear good girls; but the better you are, the worse they likes to think you were before they rescued you…. And where would they get the money to
rescue us if we was to let on we’re no worse than other people? You know what ladies and gentlemen are.” Men’s confessions are “just as big lies as ours,” she complains, resentful that men can tell their lies in public at large meetings and receive applause, whereas women’s confessions must be whispered to one woman at a time. “It aint right,” she grumbles, “spite of all their piety.” “Right!” exclaims Snobby. “Do you spose the Army’d be allowed if it went and did right? Not much. It combs our air and makes us good little blokes to be robbed and put upon.”27 In their own ways, the poor and the Salvationists are slaves of duty imposed by the governing class for its benefit.

When the title character asks her father, the millionaire Andrew Undert-shaft, what his religion is, he does not name a particular god or creed in whom or in which he might sincerely believe, and who or which might motivate him to financially donate to a religious organization aimed at alleviating the plight of the poor, but rather says “I am a Millionaire. That is my religion.” He does not deny Peter Shirley’s angry accusation that what has kept people like Shirley poor has been keeping people like Undershaft rich. To Shirley’s reprimand, “I wouldnt have your conscience, not for all your income,” Undershaft does not issue a justification for himself or a denial, for he knows that Shirley’s indictment results from tricks of the governing class; rather, he calmly ripostes: “I wouldnt have your income, not for all your conscience, Mr Shirley.”28 Because he is unashamed, which we later learn is his motto,29 his responses to Barbara and Shirley are truthful, based on knowledge of himself and the interests of his class.

His honesty about himself and his class informs his dialogue with Cusins, which follows shortly. In his religion, “money and gunpowder” are necessary to salvation. As for “honor, justice, truth, love, mercy, and so forth,” about which Cusins asks him, these are merely “the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life.” Without enough money and gunpowder—which he defines as “Freedom and power. Command of life and command of death”—one cannot afford the traditional virtues that are, in effect, cunning deceptions of the governing class; which passes them off as great values.30

Since “All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich,” Undershaft aims to buy Barbara by buying the Salvation Army. In effect confirming what Snobby Price told Rummy Mitchens, Undershaft informs Cusins that what the Army does is to draw the teeth of the poor, which “is enough for me as a man of business.” Making workers sober, honest, happy, and unselfish, with their thoughts on heavenly matters, is also advantageous to him as a capitalist, for “The profits are larger” and people like that are “the most economical,” a priceless “safeguard against revolution,” and “Indifferent to their own interests”; and they do not dwell “on Trade Union-
ism or Socialism.” As he recognizes, we learn later in the play, the way he and Snobby describe how capitalists profit by treating workers badly is not the only way to enrich them. He runs his own factory town and treats his workers differently, and his methods, he boasts, result “in a colossal profit, which comes to me.” Like the armaments maker Friedrich Alfred Krupp, who died three years before Shaw wrote *Major Barbara*, Undershaft “keeps his labor supply stable by making his workers happy, not through visions of a better life in the future, but by the tangible realities of a good life in the present,” which Undershaft does at Perivale St. Andrews and which may partly be modeled on what Krupp did with a workers’ welfare program and a model workers’ village at Essen.

Barbara refuses to accept money from him but wants him to work out his salvation. “Money is no use. Take it away,” she tells him, because the Salvation Army is not for sale. At this point, enter Mrs. Baines, her superior, who is “a Salvation Army Commissioner.” Making an enthusiastic sales pitch, “with swimming eyes,” about saved sinners, she points to Snobby as an example, and he dutifully claims he would no longer riot against the rich. “You see how we take the anger and the bitterness against you out of their hearts,” she concludes for the Army’s potential benefactor. Undershaft’s ironic reply to her is really directed to Barbara and Cusins: “It is certainly most convenient and gratifying to all large employers of labor, Mrs Baines.” In answer to her prayers, Mrs. Baines announces, Lord Saxmundham—who she reveals to be Bodger, a notorious distiller—has promised to donate five thousand pounds to the Army if five other wealthy men will each give the Army a thousand. Continuing in his ironic mode, Undershaft calls Bodger a public benefactor who was made a baronet as a result of his restoration of a cathedral and was made a baron after he gave half a million to his political party. For his proposed donation, “There is nothing left to give him. So the five thousand, I should think, is to save his soul.” Instead of rejecting Bodger’s offer, Mrs. Baines, to Barbara’s dismay, rejoices—“Heaven grant it may!”—and she promptly asks Undershaft for a contribution. Barbara is appalled. If Bodger were to come to the shelter, she explains, she would try her best to help him achieve salvation: “But he wants to send his cheque down to buy us, and go on being as wicked as ever.”

Mrs. Baines, who is pragmatic, argues that there will not be less drinking if those the Army tries to save find its doors closed. In one respect she is right, for the source of the money that permits the Army to do its work is irrelevant. In his preface to the play, Shaw points out that the Army maintains this position: “As one of its officers said, they would take money from the devil himself and be only too glad to get it out of his hands and into God’s.
They gratefully acknowledged that publicans not only give them money but allow them to collect it in the bar....”\textsuperscript{36} In another respect she is not right, for one of the tricks of the governing class is to give money to such institutions as the Army, which as Undershaft explains to Cusins and comments to Mrs. Baines, renders the poor ineffective in ways that satisfy their employers. Hoodwinked by this trick, “She is affected to tears.” “Who would have thought that any good could have come out of war and drink?” she asks, believing the question to be rhetorical. “And yet their profits are brought today to the feet of salvation to do its blessed work.”\textsuperscript{37} Barbara, who is not taken in, is aware of her father’s trick. Knowing that he, in effect, bought the Army, she resigns from it.

In the next scene, which contains the exchange about duty and tricks of the governing class, quoted earlier, it becomes clear that Stephen Undershaft has unreservedly swallowed the notions of duty and other tricks of the governing class. “I know the difference between right and wrong,” he announces to his father, as he earlier announced it to his mother. Amused, his father disdainfully praises a man with “no capacity for business, no knowledge of law, no sympathy with art, no pretension to philosophy,” who nevertheless knows what “has puzzled all the philosophers, baffled all the lawyers muddled all the men of business, and ruined most of the artists,” as “a genius, a master of masters, a god! At twentyfour, too!” Stephen, “keeping his temper with difficulty,” maintains the appearance of being unflustered: “I pretend to nothing more than any honorable English gentleman claims as his birthright.” “He knows nothing and he thinks he knows everything,” Undershaft recognizes. “That points clearly to a political career.”\textsuperscript{38}

Under the illusion, fostered by the governing class, that parliament governs the country, Stephen objects to his father’s insulting his country’s government. In what may be the play’s most powerful speech, Undershaft attempts to disabuse him of this notion. A few minutes before, Undershaft admitted to his wife that he was a member of the governing class. He now unleashes a fuller explanation of who really governs England. “I am the government of your country,” he forcefully asserts. A half dozen amateurs like Stephen, “sitting in a row in that foolish gabble shop” called parliament, are incapable of running his business. Instead, they do what pays him and people like him: “You will make war when it suits us, and keep peace when it doesn’t. You will find out that trade requires certain measures when we have decided on these measures.” When he wants a law that will raise his dividends, “you will discover that my want is a national need.” When others want something that will lower his dividends, “you will call out the police and military.” In return, members of parliament will “have the support and applause of my newspa-
pers, and the delight of imagining that you are a great statesman. Government of your country! ... I am going back to my counting-house to pay the piper and call the tune.”

Thus does the governing class govern those who supposedly govern the nation.

Although duty is not nominally an issue in the final scene, it is so in actuality, for one of this scene’s chief questions centers on whether Cusins, in succeeding Undershaft, will be duty bound to “keep the true faith of an Armorer,” which Undershaft defines unambiguously: “To give arms to all men who offer an honest price for them, without respect of persons or principles: to aristocrat and republican, to Nihilist and Tsar, to Capitalist and Socialist, to Protestant and Catholic, to burglar and policeman, to black man, white man and yellow man, to all sorts and conditions, all nationalities, all faiths, all follies, all causes and all crimes.” Considering himself free of this and other duties, Cusins refuses: “as to your Armorer’s faith, if I take my neck out of the noose of my own morality I am not going to put it into the noose of yours. I shall sell cannons to whom I please and refuse them to whom I please.”

Dismissing his refusal as irrelevant, Undershaft warns that if Cusins accepts the inheritance, he will never again do as he pleases. Will Cusins fulfill the obligation of an Armorer, thereby becoming a slave to the faith or duty of this profession?

Will he, for that matter, work during the accepted office hours, beginning at 6:00 a.m. the next morning? “Not on any account,” he “firmly” insists. “I will see the whole establishment blown up with its own dynamite before I will get up at five. My hours are healthy, rational hours: eleven to five.” Undershaft finesses this concern as he finessed the question of the Armorer’s faith: “Come when you please: before a week you will come at six and stay until I turn you out for the sake of your health.”

In other words, Undershaft is completely confident that whatever Cusins says he will do, he will willy-nilly do what Undershaft wants him to do.

Alone with Barbara, Cusins tells her he will accept the inheritance, but he pointedly refutes one of Undershaft’s certainties. In the second act, Cusins told Undershaft that like Barbara he “is in love with the common people.” In the second act, a “cold and sardonic” Undershaft rejected such love. “This love of the common people may please an earl’s granddaughter and a university professor; but I have been a common man and a poor man; and it has no romance for me.”

In the third act, he calls poverty “The worst of crimes.” His solution is not to preach or reason about poverty, but to kill it, by which he means exterminate it as a condition of life. Unpersuaded by Undershaft’s counter-argument, Cusins tells Barbara what he had told her father: “I love the common people.” As successor to Undershaft, he insists,
he wants to arm the common people against those, including “the politicians, who, once in authority, are more disastrous and tyrannical than all the fools, rascals, and imposters. I want a power simple enough for common men to use, yet strong enough to force the intellectual oligarchy to use its genius for the general good.” Whether he will actually do so—whether he will become a slave to the duty or faith of an Armorer or whether he will become its master—is an open question. What is unambiguous is that he is just as confident about his course of action as Undershaft is.