

REFLECTIONS ON IDEOLOGICAL SENTIMENTALISM

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A doctrine can be described as sentimental not because of the mere fact that it uses a symbolism of the feelings or because its language is more or less emotional, but because its actual point of departure is determined by a sentimental motive; in fact, a genuine doctrine founded on a particular aspect of reality may not try to avoid appeals to sentiment, whilst, on the contrary, an illusory theory and inspiration governed by passion in its very axiom will affect a rational or “icy” tone and display an impeccable logic while developing its basic error; the “headless” character of this logic, however will not escape the notice of those who know that logic has no validity but by virtue of the soundness— physical or metaphysical— of its point of departure.

If we take the example of a doctrine which is apparently completely intellectual and inaccessible to the emotions namely Kantianism, considered as the archetype of theories seemingly divorced from all poetry we shall have no difficulty in discovering that its starting point or “dogma” is reducible to a gratuitous reaction against all that lies beyond the reach of reason acting alone; it voices therefore, *a priori* an instinctive revolt against truths which are incomprehensible rationally and which are considered annoying on account of their very inaccessibility to ordinary reasoning. All the rest is nothing but dialectical scaffolding, ingenious or “brilliant” if you wish, but contrary to truth. What is crucial in Kantianism is not its *pro domo* logic and its few very limited lucidities, but the predominantly “irrational” desire to limit the intelligence which it voices; this results in a dehumanization of intelligence and opens the door to all the inhuman aberrations of our century.¹ In short, if the state of man earns the possibility of surpassing oneself intellectually, Kantianism is the negation of all that is essentially and integrally human.²

¹ This article was written in 1964. (Ed.)

² German Kantianists of the sixteenth century called their philosopher the “universal nullifier”; they little knew what truth they spoke. In fact what was nullified was intelligence through its’ replacement by academic quibbles, if one may be permitted to express oneself so.

Negations on this scale are always accompanied by a sort of moral taint which makes them less excusable than if it were merely a question of intellectual narrowness. The Kantists, failing to understand “dogmatic metaphysics,” overlook the enormous disproportion, between the intellectual and human greatness of those they label as “metaphysical dogmatists” and the illusions which they attribute to them; yet even if allowance be made for such a lack of understanding it seems that any honest man ought, to be sensitive, if only indirectly to the claims of these “dogmatists” at the human level. What is evidence in metaphysics becomes “dogma” for those who do not understand it— and here is an extrinsic argument of considerable significance.

It is noteworthy that Descartes has been reproached, not with the reduction of knowledge to simple logic, but with “the arbitrary character of his auxiliary concepts to which the philosopher attaches the evidence and necessity which he demands of scientific knowledge as such” (*Wundt*). Modern philosophy is decidedly the liquidation of evidences. Logic itself is but evidence of the finite and not of the Infinite, which accounts for the latter’s inability to accommodate itself completely to the framework of single-handed reason. The Cartesian inconsistency is to have presented as the fruits of logic alone evidences which in reality came to Descartes simply from his intelligence.³ This disparity between intelligence and mere logic appears in the most brutal manner, if one may say so, with Comte, where “Logicism,” emptied of all intellectual content, lands one in a complete negation of the intelligence.⁴

Since Descartes, via the “criticism” of Kant and the “positivism” of Comte— both of which are, all things considered, only systemizations of incompetence— all capacity for synthesis and conclusion has been removed from the intelligence, except on a plane so narrow as to be without relation

³ The “categorical imperative” of Kant is “an analogous inconsequence: it is both implicitly theistic and “officially” atheistic.

⁴ According to Comte, the human spirit in its “evolution,” passes through three stages, the “theological,” “metaphysical,” and “positive”: we would say that here is an “ascension” of which one of the representative bases would be Christ, for example, till it arrived, by way of Aristotle, at the grocer on the corner.

to the real scope of the human spirit.⁵

Formerly people spoke childishly of intelligent matters; in our time they excel in speaking intelligently of stupidities. In those days they made mistakes on contingent matters, when they did make mistakes, and not on essentials; in our era it is on the essential that people are mistaken, while holding positive opinions on contingent things.

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A characteristic tendency of our times— due to the fact that “the gods” have been eliminated— is that everything is crystallized in philosophy; everything becomes an article of faith, even the most innocuous things, even any kind of sentimental reaction or infirmity of the intelligence or will. It is as if one’s legs, tired of being what they are by nature, began to think according to their own perspective and assumed for themselves, by the mere fact that they thought, a total and central character. Such a thinking longs to be dramatized in a tragic sense; doubt and ignorance wish to be accepted at least under the heading of a “contribution to culture,” as apples make additions to a pile of other apples.⁶ By a similar train of thought, not to follow the extravagancies of the day, be it in philosophy, literature, art, or simply in one’s manner of living, is called to “desert our own times.” But what people forget is that our own times desert truth and all real values. We are told that nothing can or should be out of step with our times, as if they were not out of step with God, and as if it were possible to be out of step indefinitely with

⁵ If Positivism still admits the possibility of revealing natural laws, contemporary thought questions even this elementary function of reason; and that, with the help of scientific arguments which, “however, are deployed on completely different ground. It is as if one concluded that because neither white nor black exist absolutely for the eye, there is therefore nothing but grey and the relative differences between-greys; as if this empirical and partial truth, whose metaphysical significance is obvious, could weaken the “relatively absolute” difference between black and white.

⁶ In our time the normal admission “I am not intelligent enough” becomes “the world is nonsensical”; and for the old inference that one should “ask the wise” is substituted the new conclusion that “it is the purveyors of the gods and of the worlds beyond who are the bad men”, or some other remark of his kind.

God, truth and the nature of things, all three.

Throughout the ages religions have inculcated in man the consciousness of what he really is, of his fundamental majesty, coupled with his actual imperfection and impotence; man accepted this message because he still possessed a natural intuition of his situation in the universe. Now the peculiarity of man desirous of embodying our times is the need to feel at ease in an imperfection that has become for him practically a perfection of its own; it is the desire, as a reaction against the centuries, to feel oneself perfect at small expense—whence the reduction of the real to an infinitesimal segment of itself— and to shake off the yoke of a dogma which is thought degrading because it puts us in our proper place; in short, there is a wish “to start again from scratch” in full liberty of choice. This might well be described as taking one’s own wishes for reality, for it is not sufficient to desire a change in order to be able to alter one’s colour or size; the reality into which we are woven by an ineluctable fatality is not modified at the will of our impulses, our needs of causality, or our lassitudes; it does not cease to be real as a result of our repugnance towards a given religious formalism, perhaps one that to us seems too imaginative or sentimental, but yet is required *a priori* by the human environment of which we form a part. From the standpoint of eschatological realities, to which nothing can remain immune in the final reckoning, all this rationalist—sentimentalist controversy would seem like a sort of literary game doomed to instantaneous evaporation in the abysses that lie beyond the grave.

Indignation against abuses is only too apt to bring with it the rejection of the positive principles which these abuses had falsified in the first place; when sentimental reaction is given a philosophical twist it perverts and impoverishes imagination. The error itself creates the stage-setting it requires in order to feel comfortable. The world becomes increasingly a system of stage— settings destined to limit and distort the imaginative faculty by imposing upon it an unshakable conviction that all this is “reality” and that there is no other and that all that is outside this system is nothing but naive and culpable “romanticism”. In the nineteenth century, and to a certain extent ever since the Renaissance, people have tried practically to create a universe in which there would be only man; in our time man has lost the initiative and is now sliding about in a universe— or pseudo-universe— where

only the machine is “real”; under these conditions one can no longer speak even of “humanism:’ In any case, man by attributing to himself his own self-sufficient reason, cannot remain what he is; no longer believing in that which surpasses him and not placing his ideals above himself, he thereby condemns himself to the subhuman. If one is still at all sensitive to true norms, it is difficult to deny that the machine tends to make man into its own counterpart— violent, brutal, vulgar, quantitative and stupid like itself; all modern “culture” is so affected in greater or lesser degree. This is what partly explains the cult of “sincerity” and the mystique of “engagement”’: one must be “sincere” because the machine is devoid of mystery and because it is as incapable of discretion as of generosity; one must be “engaged” because the machine possesses no value apart from its productive capacity and because it demands ceaseless surveillance and even a complete self-surrender⁷ by men and mankind who thus become its food. We are to refrain from “compliance” in literature and art because the machine does not so behave and because in the minds of its slaves and creatures its ugliness, clamour and implacability pass for “reality.” Above all one must not have a God, since the machine has none and even usurps this role itself.⁸ Moreover, the general trend of our times is instinctively hostile to everything spiritual. Supposing some tribe buys a cannon and that cannon happens to explode, destroying a whole village, then the fault is not with those who bought the cannon, nor with those who sold it or those who did not know how to handle it, but with the priests and gods who had governed the tribe over the ages. Fortunately this is not the whole story and in spite of everything one can also sometimes observe wholesome reactions against this state of mind; but the preceding picture holds none the less a symbolic validity with regard to our deplorable epoch.

⁷ “If it be objected that the same was true of the crafts of old, we would reply that there is a notable difference, in that these occupations displayed a properly human character based on contemplation, and on that account entailed neither the agitation nor the oppressions characteristic of the machine age.

⁸ We would stress that in speaking of “God” we have in mind not a concept which would be contrary— or in as much as It would be contrary— to Buddhism, but the “nirvanic” Reality which underlies all traditional concepts of the Absolute. It is this Reality which in the Mahayana expresses itself by the universal *Dharmakīya*. or in other words, by the Adhi-Buddha. In Japanese terms, the same function attaches to *Amitabba* (*Amida*) or *Vairochana*’ (*Dainichi*). according to the respective schools.

A typical example of the reasoning which results from this mentality is the following: there are so many religions, each teaches something different, so they cannot all be correct, therefore none of them is true.⁹ It is as if one said: there are so many individuals, each one believes himself to be “I”, so they cannot all be right and in consequence none of them is “I”, starting with the speaker; this proposition demonstrates the absurdity— not logical, but effective—¹⁰ of both the foregoing examples, thanks to the real analogy between the inevitable limitation of religious language and the just as inevitable limitation of the ego. To draw this inference, as do the atheists who invoke the argument in question, is practically to deny the diversity of the conscious subject as well as the diversity of the aspects of the object to be known, and therefore also the existence of points of view and aspects; logically the fact of noticing the diversity of religions could lead to the opposite conclusion, that is to say: since in every period and among all peoples there have been religions, affirming unanimously the reality of one Supreme Power and of a beyond, it is more than probable— to say the least— that this unanimity of the human mind rests on something positive and transmits essential truths, “pre-logical” if you wish, but also supra-logical and “subconsciously evident”;¹¹ if the materialists do not reason thus it is precisely because they are affected by an imaginative and sentimental prejudice. The diversity of religions— or traditions, if one so prefers—¹² far from proving the falseness of religion or tradition as such, on the contrary

⁹ Also why not reason thus: there are so many philosophies which contradict each other, so they cannot all be right, therefore no philosophy is correct, including atheistic materialism.

¹⁰ That which demonstrates only its own logicity is not a guarantee of truth.

¹¹ We refer, here, not to the inferior “subconscious” of certain psychologists, but to the fact that the truths which Revelation communicates to us, and which are contained in the very substance of the intellect, are “subconscious” for the majority of men.

¹² According to Guenon, the word “religion” is only applicable to the three Semitic monotheisms, which are characterized by three constituent elements: a dogma, a morality, and a cult. In the opinion of Coomaraswamy and also according to general usage, the word “religion” is the western term for all integral, and thus at the same time social and spiritual, tradition, be its formal doctrine theological or properly metaphysical. From this point of view all that need be observed is that the word *religio* (from *relegere*, “to gather together”, or *reliquere*, “to bind together”) bears a special connotation amongst the Semites and Westerners, as is the case with many other things. As for the word “tradition,” it may be applied without abuse to various things, even in the interior of a religion.

demonstrates the transcendence of Revelation and the relativity of human understanding at one and the same time.

In the same connection it is impossible not to pause over the very crucial question of democratic and anti-theocratic ideology. It is possible for a social theory, founded— as a reaction against particular abuses— on a desire for liberty but at the same time imparting an inordinate character to this claim in disregard of the real potentialities and interests of the individual, to develop without any obvious dialectical inconsistency and thus give the impression of a perfect objectivity. The success of an ideology of this kind is explained by the fact that men who ignore the profound reasons of our terrestrial situations and for whom principles are merely “abstractions,” easily allow themselves to be convinced by the violent voicing of a partially legitimate cause, without asking themselves if the ideology that is being added to it be true or false; because we are hungry the inaccessible date-palm is a thief, and always has been. The passionate impulse— even when disguised as “cold” reasoning— takes no account of the fact that a partial truth becomes false when one takes it out of its total context and imparts to it, under this condition of artificial isolation, a quasi unconditional significance.

In reality the external liberty of creatures is relative and conditional and cannot be otherwise; what tradition seeks to realize— and what it does realize to the extent that our world of approximations permits— is a kind of balance between individual terrestrial freedom and the chances of celestial wellbeing; if one believes in eternal life, a liberty which is disproportionate in relation to such and such individual potentialities, and consequently compromises such and such chances of salvation, is clearly not more desirable than a privation of liberty which does not compromise them. It is from this angle that must be considered whatever in traditional civilizations (the mere question of abuses is by the way) offends in too absolute a manner the sensibility of individualists who believe in nothing or whose belief has no bearing on their intelligence and imagination; we say “too absolute” since it is normal for “legitimate” or “inevitable” ills to offend the sensibility of just men; but it is abnormal and in any case illegitimate that men draw erroneous conclusions from their own sensibility.

The experience of the false “liberty” which is propounded as an end in

itself or as “art for art’s sake”— as if one could be really free outside the truth and without interior liberty!— this experience we say, is only in its beginning phase, though the world has already gathered some of the bitter fruits of it. All that is still human normal and stable in the world only survives there through the vitality of ancestral traditions— of “prejudices” if one so prefers whether it be a matter of the West, moulded by Christianity, or even of some Nilotic or Amazonian tribe. To have some idea of what the “free man of tomorrow” might be like the man starting again from zero and “creating himself”—¹³ but in reality the man of the machine which has escaped from his control— it is sufficient to take a glance at the peculiar “existentialist” psychology of certain young people particularly in the big cities. Let us not anticipate however, since our aim is simply to point out that if the profound and subconscious impressions of tradition are removed from man there remain finally only the scars of his fall and the unleashing of the inhuman elements¹⁴ in his being.

Logically democracy is opposable to tyranny, but in fact leads to it. That is to say since its own reaction is sentimental— without which it would be centripetal and would tend towards theocracy, the only guarantee of a realistic liberty— it is only an extreme which, by its unrealistic negation of authority and competence calls forth another extreme and a new authoritarian reaction one which this time is authoritarian and tyrannical in its very principle. The democratic illusion appears above all in the following points: in democracy truth amounts to the belief of the majority, whereof the truth is practically the “creation”; democracy itself is only true in as far as and as long as, the majority believes in it, thus it carries in its breast the germ of its own suicide. Authority, which one is obliged to tolerate under pain of anarchy, lives at the mercy of the electors hence the impossibility of real government. The ideal of “liberty” makes a prisoner of the government, a prisoner who must constantly follow the interests of various pressure groups; the electoral campaigns themselves prove that the aspirants to authority must

¹³ And creating the truth at the same time, of course.

¹⁴ Instead of repeating incessantly that the Middle Ages were horrible people would do better to resign themselves to the fact that it is thus that men of the Iron Age behave—in Europe and elsewhere and in both good or evil—when they take their religion seriously; our vaunted “softening of moral codes” and “tolerance” offer little interest apart from the fact that their price is religious indifference anti—spiritual individualism, materialism and, false mysticism.

dupe the electors, and the means of this dupery are so incredibly vulgar and stupid and constitute such a degradation of the people that this alone should suffice to reduce all democratic ideology to nonsense. That does not necessarily mean that no form of democracy is possible; but then it is primarily a question of communities of limited size— especially nomadic ones— and secondly of a democracy having an aristocratic and theocratic centre, and not of a secular egalitarianism imposed upon large sedentary populations.

We can enlarge on this further: it can be that a man is intelligent and competent, or that a minority is; but it cannot happen that the majority is intelligent and competent, or “more intelligent” or “more competent”; the adage *vox populi vox Dei* has no meaning except in a religious framework which confers a function of “medium” on the crowds, who then express themselves, not by thought but by intuition and under the influence of Heaven; unless it is a matter of the competence pertaining to every sane-minded, God-fearing man, in which case the feeling of the majority coincides in all ways with what may be called “the good.” It is clear that the people as a collective vehicle of religion enjoys a positive character— all religions ‘testify to this¹⁵— and is thus instinctively right in the face of pernicious and impious exceptions;¹⁶ moreover it is clear that, viewed from a slightly different angle, the people’s “fanaticism”¹⁷ in spite of its inescapable limitations and abuses, represents a centripetal and regulating force. The people is what it is, both in good and evil; it has not the virtues of the “centre,” but it may have those of the “totality,” on condition that the “centre” determines that totality. Besides the word “people” itself admits of two meanings; it denotes either the majority, as opposed to intellectual and aristocratic elites, or the total or integral collectivity, comprising the majority and the elites at one and the

¹⁵ Without which there would be neither “Israel” nor “the mystic body of Christ,” nor” the Muhammadan community”.

¹⁶ It can also be mistaken when it is a question of phenomena exceeding the bounds of exoterism, even though there is also an aspect of esoterism that is anchored in the people, notably in its craft institutions.

¹⁷ In our time all that is essential, or even merely serious, in a religion is called “fanaticism”. Other labels of same kind are “convention”, “conformity,” “romantic,” “picturesque”; it is always a matter of compromising or ridiculing anything which is opposed to the reign of the machine.

same time; in this last sense it is self-evident that the government— apart from its celestial origin— derives from the people and that the chivalric and sacerdotal elites themselves are an expression of the popular genius; one could almost apologize for pointing out anything so obvious.

A word on “free thought,” or more exactly on the quasi moral obligation to “think for themselves” currently attributed to all men; this demand is incompatible with the nature of man, for the normal and virtuous man, as a member of a social and traditional community, generally takes into account the limits of his own abilities. One of two things is possible: either the man is exceptionally gifted on such and such a plane and therefore nothing can stop him from thinking in an original way, which he will moreover do consonantly with tradition precisely because his intelligence enables him to grasp the necessity of this harmony; or the man is of mediocre intelligence, either on some particular plane or in a general way, in which case he relies on the judgments of those more competent than himself, which in his case is the most intelligent thing he can do. The craze for detaching the individual from the intellectual hierarchy, or, in other words for individualizing him intellectually, is a violation of his nature and is practically equivalent to the abolition of intelligence and also of the virtues without which real understanding cannot fully take effect. This way only leads to anarchy and to the codification of men’s inability to think.

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A “contemporary” variant of the ideological sentimentalism which we have in mind, one that is very prevalent even among “believers”, is the demagogic obsession with purely “social” values. Formerly, when all the world was religious, poverty preserved the poor from hypocrisy, or from a certain kind of hypocrisy. In our time poverty too often leads to unbelief and envy, especially in countries which have been industrialized or otherwise contaminated by the industrialist mentality— with the result that rich and poor are quits; the hypocrisy of one side is answered by the impiety of the other. It is profoundly unjust to prefer this new shortcoming of the poor to the habitual and traditionally stigmatized shortcoming of the rich and to excuse the impiety of the ones because of their poverty without excusing the others because of their riches: if the poor are victims of their estate the rich are

equally so of theirs; if poverty confers the right to impiety riches equally confer the right to a simulation of piety. If the one side is to be pitied spiritually the other is to be pitied and excused on the same grounds seeing that the difference between them rests solely on completely exterior and easily reversible situations, and not on anything fundamental in the nature of man. One can only prefer the poor when they are better than the rich in their spiritual sincerity, their patience and their secret heroism— such poor always exist, as also do rich men who are detached from their riches— and not when they are worse by their unbelief, envy and hatred. The Christians persecuted by Nero suffered far more grievously than any underpaid workmen of today without theology granting them for that reason the right to cease to believe in God or to scorn His laws; tradition never admitted this kind of economic blackmail addressed to God.

In short, three questions determine the human problem in spite of all the humanitarian and progressivist sentimentalities now in vogue; if all men were exempt from material cares, would the world be saved? Assuredly not; for evil resides above all in man himself as experience proves abundantly.¹⁸ If all men set themselves to supply the needs of others with regard to their physical wellbeing conceived apart from religion would the world be saved? No, certainly not for the very basis of the problem would remain untouched. If all men thought of God, to the point of forgetting their own wellbeing would the world be saved? Yes certainly; “the rest shall be added unto you” says the Gospel, that is to say the reform of man would involve *ipso facto* a reform of the world, and even a beneficial reaction on the part of the whole cosmic environment.

Progressivism is a desire to eliminate effects without wishing to eliminate their causes; it is a wish to abolish calamities without realizing that they are nothing other than man himself; they necessarily result from his metaphysical ignorance, or his lack of the love of God. Account must equally be taken of this: God cannot in the first place “take an interest” in the wellbeing of creatures; what he wants is their souls and their imperishable good and not

¹⁸ In economically super-saturated countries, imbued with social idealism and “humanitarian” psycho-analysis, the moral problem is in no way solved; privileged youth shows itself capable of the most monstrous crimes without having the excuse of poverty.

primarily the transitory things of the material world. If God also wants our earthly wellbeing it is not because he regards it as an end in itself, but because a certain happiness is the normal condition of man who, however is essentially created with a view to eternal values. God takes interest in our wellbeing to the extent that we may profit from it, in His sight, and not otherwise; but outside this “interest”— if such a word be permissible here despite its obvious inadequacy— God “sends down his rain upon the just and unjust alike.” The same applies to bread: truth must be imparted because “man does not live by bread alone”; to hunger with truth is better than to live at ease with error. Wellbeing is there to serve our ultimate ends as clay is there to make vessels.

Many are prone to accuse the contemplatives, preoccupied with their salvation of “selfishness” and maintain that instead of saving oneself one should save others; but this argument is firstly hypocritical and secondly absurd because, on the one hand, it is not from any excess of virtue that those who argue thus refuse sanctification and because, on the other hand it is impossible to save others for one can only know and will with one’s own knowledge and one’s own will; if it be possible to contribute to the salvation of others it is only by virtue of one’s own salvation. No man has ever rendered service to anyone out of “altruism” while remaining attached to his own faults; whoever neglects his own salvation certainly will save no one else. To mask passions and spiritual indifference behind a facade of good works only proves one’s own hypocrisy. The social interest can only be defined in terms of the truth; it is impossible to define truth in terms of the social.

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Too often one hears the reproach of “sentimentality” levelled at those who protest, not against some necessary evil, but against meanness; this reproach, even if it accidentally coincides with the truth from a purely psychological point of view, is yet completely unjustified when it is designed to reduce intelligent reactions to their possible emotional concomitants. For: that the strong attack the weak is sometimes an unavoidable evil and even in certain respects an effect of a natural law, provided the means used do not violate the laws of nature as in mechanized wars, and provided that force does not

serve intrinsically false ideas, which would be yet another anomaly¹⁹; but that the strong should crush the weak by means of an interested hypocrisy with its accompanying meanness is neither natural nor inevitable; it is gratuitous and even infamous to label as “sentimentality” all opinion which condemns these methods; “realism” can justify violence, but never villainies. But there is not only this alternative; there are still facts which, without being in themselves either necessary evils or villainies properly speaking, are due in the main to a distressing and senseless thoughtlessness; such are the abuses brought about by prejudice, complacency, lack of imagination and unconscious habit; such things are inevitable, not only in the particular but universally, the collective man of the “dark age” being what he is. In this case, to be greatly moved by a particular happening does not necessarily spell a culpable sentimentality; what would be so is to be indignant against the very existence of such phenomena within an ancient civilization and to wish to destroy the whole civilization for the sake of abolishing the happenings in question.

When we set out to compare antiquity with our own times two extremes are noticeable; on the one hand we have the abstract and marmoreal hardness of the ancients, founded on the law of natural selection and on the aristocratic virtues of gods and heroes, and on the other hand we have the democratic excesses of our day, such as the reign of inferiors, the cult of mediocrity and vulgarity, the sentimentalist protection, not of the weak, but of weakness and defects as such²⁰ and the psychological softness in respect of all forms of laxity and vice, by which immorality is upheld in the name of liberty and sincerity— not to mention stupidity and idle chatter masquerading as culture or the scorn of wisdom and the neutralization of religion or the misdeeds of an atheistical science that leads to over-population, degeneration and catastrophe. These aberrations allow us, if not to condone the faults of the ancients, at least to understand their outlook; it will then be understood

¹⁹ We are referring above all to tribal or feudal wars, or wars of expansion of the traditional civilizations. Some will object that there have always been machines and that a bow is nothing else, which is as false as to claim that a circle is a sphere or a drawing is a statue. Here there is a difference of dimensions whose causes are profound and not merely quantitative.

²⁰ The protection of the weak has always been practised, in one form or another, in civilizations which still remain healthy.

that there is no occasion to condemn this outlook in itself unconditionally in the name of a so-called “moral progress” such as in reality only leads to the opposite excesses, to say the least of it.²¹ Like all social dreaming, that of egalitarianism presupposes a fragmentary world made up exclusively of honest men who think only of kneading their bread in tranquillity without being molested by wolves or by the gods; but the wolves are to be found within the “decent fellows” themselves, and as for the conniving gods of “fanaticism,” one has only to banish them for devils to come in and take their place.

Nothing could be more false than to claim that the Middle Ages were as good as our era is bad; the Middle Ages were wicked inasmuch as abuses which distorted the traditional principles were developed to their uttermost in relation to the possibilities of the time, without which the modern reaction— Renaissance and Reformation— could not have happened. But compared with our times the Middle Ages were nevertheless “better,” and even “good,” from the very fact that they were still ruled by genuine principles.

At every turn we are told that we must “be contemporary” in our ideas and that the tact of “looking back” or “hanging back” amounts to treason in respect of the “categorical imperative” which is our own century: nothing could ever confer justification or plausibility on this unreasonable demand. “There is no right greater than that of the truth”, say the Hindus; and if two and two make four, this certainly is not more or less true in terms of some particular time or other. Everything which goes on in our time forms part of that time, including opposition to its tendencies; the copying of antiquity formed part of the Renaissance outlook, and if in our time some people look towards the Middle Ages or the East, one is bound to register the fact as also belonging to the period in which we live. It is the nature of things which determines definitely what is or is not of our time; it is certainly not for men to decide what has the right to be true and what has not.

²¹ Collectivist dictatorships have sprung from democracy and re-edit its prejudices in the sense that they also intend to realize the so-called humanitarian ideals, but by Babylonian means.

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Philosophical “vitalism” masquerades also under the guise of an impeccable logic, a fallacious and properly infra-human line of thought. The devotees of “life” for whom religion or wisdom is only an unintelligible kill-joy artificial and morbid overlook all the following truths, namely that human intelligence is capable of objectivizing life and of opposing itself to it to a certain extent and that this fact cannot be devoid of meaning, everything having its efficient cause; also that it is by this capacity of objectivization and opposition versus subjective impulses that man shows himself human life and pleasure being common also to all infra-human creatures; that there is not only life but also death, not only pleasure but also pain, of which man alone can give account *a priori*; that man ought to follow his nature as animals follow theirs, and that in following it fully he transcends appearances and gives them a significance which surpasses their shifting plane and finally unites them in the same stable and universal reality. For man is intelligence and intelligence is the superseding of forms and the realization of the invisible Essence; to speak of human intelligence is to speak of the absolute and the transcendent.

Of all earthly creatures man alone knows, firstly that pleasure is contingent and ephemeral, and secondly that it is not shared by all. That is to say he knows that other *egos* do not enjoy the pleasures of our *ego* and that, whatever our rejoicing, there are always other creatures who suffer, and vice versa; which proves that pleasure is not everything nor is life. Religion and metaphysics spring from the depths of our specifically human nature—precisely by virtue of its profundity which is not the case with the characteristics man shares with animals and plants.

To refute an error does not mean ignoring the fact that its existence is, in a sense, necessary; the two things are situated on different planes. We do not accept error, but we accept its existence because “scandal must needs be”. It is feeble and vague minds which accept error merely because they perceive that it is impossible for it not to exist.

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We said at the beginning of this article that a doctrine merits the epithet “sentimental,” not because it makes use of a symbolism of the feelings, or because it reflects incidentally in its form the sentiments of the writer who expounds it, but because its point of departure is determined more by feeling than by objective reality, which means that the latter is violated by the former. To this definition we must add a reservation in favour of the traditional doctrines, or some of them; strictly speaking a true doctrine could be qualified by the use of the word “sentimental” when sentiment is introduced into the very substance of that doctrine, whilst at the same time limiting the truth, by force of circumstance, on account of the “subjective” and affective character of sentimentality as such; it is in this sense that Guenon speaks of the presence of a sentimental element in the Semitic exoterisms, while pointing out that it is this element which accounts for the incompatibilities between dogmas drawn from different sources. But, in this case, the term “sentimental” cannot mean that the doctrine itself originates in a sentimental reaction, one that is basically human therefore, as happens with profane ideologies; on the contrary, here the marriage between truth and sentiment is a beneficial and providential concession to certain psychological predispositions, so that the epithet in question is only applicable on condition that one also specifies that it concerns doctrines that remain properly orthodox.

The Intellect— that kind of static Revelation which is permanent in principle and “supernaturally natural”— is not opposed to any possible expression of the Real; it is situated above sentiment, imagination, memory and reason, but it can at the same time illuminate and determine all of these because they are like its individualized branches and arranged as receptacles to receive the light from on high and to translate it according to their respective capacities. The positive quintessence of sentiment is love; and love, in the measure that it surpasses itself in the direction of its supernatural source, is the love of man for God and of God for man; finally it is Beatitude beginningless and endless.