

The Meaning of History

Historicism

The primary effect of accelerated economic modernization was to transform the principles of rational thought in to general social and political objectives. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both political leaders and social thinkers discussed order, peace and freedom in social terms; throughout the long nineteenth century, which lasted well in to the twentieth, they transformed a natural law in to a collective will. The idea of *progress* is the clearest expression of this politicization of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The advance of reason no longer merely requires the removal of the obstacles in its path; modernity is something to be loved and willed. The goal is to organize a self-motivating society which can create modernity. The social thought of the period is, however, still dominated by the identification of social actors with natural forces. This is true of both capitalist thought, which adopts as its hero the entrepreneur who is motivated by the quest for profit, and socialist thought, for which the workers' movement is an expression of productive forces that are trying to escape the contradictions in which they are imprisoned by capitalist relations of production. Social and political liberation represents a return to nature or to Being, and scientific reason will reunite man with the universe. Condorcet (1795) was confident that the progress of the human spirit would ensure universal happiness; in the nineteenth century, it was believed that political and social mobilization, and the will to happiness were the motors behind industrial progress. Labour, organization and investment would create a technologically-based society that would generate affluence and freedom. Modernity had been an idea; it was now primarily a will, but that did not destroy the link between human action and the laws of nature and history. There is,

then, a basic continuity between the century of the Enlightenment and the era of progress.

For less subtle thinkers, this meant quite simply the victory of positive thought, and therefore the dissolution of subjectivity in to the rationality of scientific objectivity. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, scientism enjoyed great success in intellectual life. The break with the scientific belief that once the facts had been clearly established, the laws of historical evolution would be revealed, came with the development of the social sciences and especially the work of Weber in Germany and Durkheim in France. These famous debates, which were continued by Simiand and then by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, had more far-reaching effects in Germany than in France.

Historicist thought is of much greater interest. Whether or not it takes an idealist form, it identifies modernization with the development of the human spirit, and the triumph of reason with that of freedom, the formation of the nation or the final triumph of social justice. For some, the correspondence between economic activity and social organization provides an infrastructure which determines every manifestation of political and cultural life. Whilst this idea does introduce an economic determinism, greater importance should be accorded to the assertion that all forms of collective life are manifestations of a society's ability and will to produce and transform itself.

Social thought has distanced itself from historicism with such violence, especially in recent decades, that we have almost forgotten what it once represented, but it would be foolish to consign it to the 'dustbin of history' without further ado. Earlier modes of thought had investigated the nature of politics, religion, the family and especially law, and therefore the causal relations that existed between these different orders of reality. Did ideas determine politics, or was politics determined by the economy? What are the causes that bring about the victory of a nation, or the decline and fall of the Roman Empire? Historicism replaced these questions with an analysis that defined phenomena in terms of their position on a tradition-modernity axis. Marxist thought itself is not so much an economic determinism as an expression of the view that society is a product of the practice of labour and of the contradictions between the rational development of the productive forces and profit, and between the direction or meaning [*sens*] of historical evolution and the irrationality of private interests. And the image of communism it proposes is not that of a rationalized society, but that of a society in which each will receive in accordance with their needs. Historicist thought in all its forms is dominated by the concept of *totality*. It replaces the concept

of institution, which had been so central for the previous period. This is why the idea of progress insistently identifies economic growth with national development. As we can see from both the predominantly German concept of a national economy and the French idea of the nation, which is associated in republican and secular thinking with reason's triumph over tradition, progress implies that social and economic modernity takes the concrete form of the formation of the *nation*. This same theme was taken up by the educational ideology of the Third Republic, and it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that it began to fade. Modernity is therefore not divorced from modernization, as was the case with the earlier philosophy of the Enlightenment, but it does take on greater importance in a century when progress no longer means intellectual progress alone. It now means the development of forms of production and labour at a time when industrialization, urbanization and the extension of public administration are having a drastic effect on the lives of most people. Historicism asserts that the internal workings of a society can be explained in terms of the developments that are taking it in the direction of modernity. In the last analysis, any social problem is a struggle between the past and the future. The sense [*sens*] of history refers to both the direction in which it is moving and its signification. History will lead to the triumph of modernity, and modernity means complexity, efficacy, differentiation and therefore rationalization. History is also the emergence of a consciousness that is synonymous with reason and will, and that consciousness will replace submission to the established order and to the heritage of the past.

The historicist vision has often been criticized for being inhuman. It has been accused of justifying the increasingly absolute power of the leaders of economy and society over individuals, particular groups and minorities. It would, however, be a mistake to reduce it to the subordination of individual life and thought to impersonal economic forces. Historicism, and all that it implied for better and for worse, was a voluntarism rather than a naturalism. In that sense, the idea of a *subject*, which is identified with the idea that history has a meaning and direction, is ubiquitous in the nineteenth century – the century of great epic and lyrical narratives. It had been marginalized by the philosophies of the eighteenth century, which were suspicious of its religious origins. The nineteenth century in fact sees the convergence of two intellectual currents – idealism and materialism – and the disappearance of the old dichotomies between reason and religion, the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of conviction, and the world of phenomena and the world of noumena. The most important thing of all is that society's practices of production and culture are unified

within a nature which is fully committed to its own modernization. The idea of modernity is triumphant and will not tolerate the existence of anything else. The moment when we began to think of ourselves in purely historical terms is a central moment in our history.

How did this fusion come about? How did the heritage of Locke come to be combined with that of Rousseau, the liberalism of the defender of the rights of man with the idea of the general will? How was the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century divorce between these currents replaced by a single intellectual system, by a belief in progress that had both the mobilizing power of a religion and the obviousness of a scientific truth? The primary reason for the transformation was the French Revolution, and not the industrial revolution. Whilst the latter did reinforce evolutionary and even positivist thought, it was the French Revolution that introduced the idea of a historical actor in to both thought and history. It was the Revolution that introduced the idea that individuals or social categories had a rendezvous with destiny or a historical necessity. And it did so outside the religious context of the Judaic idea of a chosen people. The Revolution that turned France upside down was not simply French, whereas the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was and remains a specifically English phenomenon. Those who took part in the French Revolution, those who had heads cut off and those whose heads were cut off, those who experienced the revolutionary *journées* as the soldiers of Year II, not to mention the Bonaparte who was transformed in to Napoléon, were all epic figures whose historic significance goes far beyond their individual personalities. In a very short and compressed space of time, they all lived through the clash between a millenary past and a future which could be measured in centuries. In such a situation, how could the divorce between natural objectivity and human subjectivity be sustained?

The idea of *progress* has a central or intermediary place between the idea of rationalization and that of development. The latter accords primacy to politics, the former to knowledge. The idea of progress asserts that development policies and the triumph of reason are one and the same. It foreshadows the application of science to politics, and therefore identifies a political will with a historic necessity. To believe in progress means loving the future, which is both unavoidable and radiant. The Second International, whose ideas spread to most countries in Western Europe, expressed the same view when it asserted that socialism would emerge from capitalism once capitalism had exhausted its ability to create new productive forces and when it called for collective action on the part of the workers and intervention on the part of their elected representatives. To borrow one of

Nietzsche's most famous expressions, we might even speak of an *amor fati* or love of destiny.

According to this view, social conflicts are primarily conflicts between the future and the past, but the victory of the future is ensured not only by the progress of reason, but also, and especially, by economic success and successful collective action. This idea lies at the heart of all versions of the belief in modernization. The influential sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset has attempted to demonstrate that economic growth, political freedom and personal happiness increase at the same rate, and that this synchrony has to be termed progress. How is progress to be brought about? Initially through the rationalization of labour, which was to be the great slogan of industry from Taylor and Ford to their enthusiastic disciple Lenin. Secondly, and most importantly, through the action of a political power which can mobilize energy – a term borrowed from physics – so as to accelerate modernization. Which means that local traditions and loyalties have to be subordinated to a high degree of national integration. The correspondence between reason and will, the subordination of the individual to society, and the subordination of society to the modernization of production and the might of the State, make possible a collective mobilization. And the call for rationalization, which is always elitist, is powerless to resist it.

Revolution

This is why historicist thought is closely associated with the *revolutionary* idea. The idea is present from the very beginnings of modernist thought, but after the French Revolution it acquires a central role which it will lose only with the departure of many Central and Eastern European countries from the Communist system in 1989. The revolutionary idea combines three elements: the will to liberate the forces of modernity, the struggle against an *ancien régime* that is an obstacle to modernization and the triumph of reason, and the assertion of a national will identified with modernization. All revolutions are modernizing, liberating national. Historicist thought is weaker when, as in the very centre of the capitalist system, the economy seems to govern history and when it is possible to dream of the withering away of the State. Conversely, it grows stronger when a nation identifies its renaissance or independence with modernization, as was the case in Germany and Italy, and then in a great number of countries in Europe and other continents. The universalism of the Enlightenment concerned only an elite, and sometimes only the immediate entourage of enlightened despots; the idea of revolu-

tion rouses nations, or at least a vast middle class. France became a beacon for these international revolutionary movements, even though it was Germany which saw the broadest development of a revolutionary political movement, and even though the revolution which was to exert the greatest influence on the twentieth century occurred in Russia. The explanation is that in France the 'Great Revolution' led to an exceptionally close association between the destruction of the Ancien Régime and the victorious nation's triumph over a coalition of Princes and internal enemies. This political vision was so powerful that its effects are still felt today, even though the political, social and intellectual situation has changed completely. Intellectuals and politicians continue to celebrate a revolutionary nationalism. Without it, the strange alliance between communists and socialists which lasted, with one interruption, from 1972 to 1984 would have been inconceivable.

All these ideas, which are in fact sentiments rather than ideas, come together with a passion in the work of Michelet. From the *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (Michelet 1831) to *Le Peuple* (Michelet 1846) and the *Histoire de la Révolution française* (Michelet 1852–3), no theme is more central to Michelet than the history of France, viewed as that of a person and nation willingly sacrificed for the cause of justice. His passion for the Revolution stems from the fact that it was the creation of a people who saved freedom at Valmy and Jemmapes and, more generally, from the fact that it created a unity between reason and faith and thus ensured the victory of freedom over fatality, and the victory of justice over grace, as Michelet himself puts it. From 1843 onwards, Michelet became not simply anticlerical – this was the moment when he published his attack on the Jesuits (Michelet 1843) – but antireligious. He abandoned his work on the Middle Ages, developed a passion for the Renaissance, and then flung himself in to the study of the Revolution. Yet when he speaks of the modern world, he constantly speaks of faith and love, and of the rediscovery of a unity that lies beyond the the class struggle. This unity is the unity of France, of the *patrie*, and in Michelet's view it is best symbolized by the Fête de la Fédération of 14 July 1790. As he adds that the people could create justice and freedom only by making sacrifices and shedding its own blood, all the major themes of historicist thought are present in his work, which is as much a philosophy of history as an exercise in historiography: belief in an evolution towards freedom, the identification of justice with a nation, namely France, a quest for the unity of *la patrie* which transcends social divisions, and the dream of a new religion which will at last be able to unite society. Modernity is the reign of love and justice, the

reconciliation of the elements of a Whole which is not merely the sum of its parts, but the goal towards which each individual element is striving.

Even when it takes an attenuated form, the revolutionary idea is a much more powerful mobilizing force than that of natural selection, which reduces history to a struggle won by the fittest, or in other words the strongest. How could the majority be inspired by an ideology which celebrates the victory of minorities? Historicism and its practical expression, namely revolutionary action, mobilize the masses in the name of the nation and history, and against the minorities who are blocking modernization in order to protect their interests and privileges. François Furet has demonstrated (Furet 1988) that the idea of the French Revolution and especially the thought of Robespierre, who was its greatest actor, centred upon the assertion that the revolutionary process was natural but must also be a matter of will, that the Revolution was as much the creation of virtue as of necessity. That is why the body politic had to be as pure as a crystal and cleansed of all dross, of all the traitors who were plotting on behalf of tyrants. The Revolution is defined by the dominance of political categories over all other categories and therefore by the closure of the political universe as it strives for purity, mobilizes its forces and unleashes its armies against internal enemies, and especially against revolutionaries who have betrayed the spirit of the Revolution. Hence the importance of the public meetings of the Clubs and of the speeches of the Jacobin leaders. Their speeches do not supply a programme, but rather a defence of revolutionary purity, of the internal dynamic of the Revolution, and a tireless denunciation of the luke-warm, who inevitably become traitors. Furet (1988: 397) sums up the idea of Revolution thus: 'The French idea of revolution is characterized by an extraordinary emphasis on the political and on the new State's ability to change society.' A few pages earlier, he spells out what this implies: 'The Republic presupposes that people and State are by their very nature inseparable.'

It was therefore extremely difficult to separate out social problems from political problems. In that sense, the best and most critical observer is Marx, who denounces the 'political illusion' that was so powerful in France, especially during the Paris Commune. The majority aped the Commune of 1793, got drunk on revolutionary rhetoric and dared to expel from their ranks a minority which included representatives of the International. In France, the dominance of political forces over social forces did not disappear after 1848 and 1871; it could be found intact in the Common Programme of the Left in 1972. The nineteenth century was an epic century, even though we

have long been taught to see it mainly as the century which saw the birth of large-scale industrialization. Those who spoke of an age of revolutions were right to see this political definition as carrying more weight than the idea of industrial society. That idea often introduces an economic determinism which obscures the mechanisms that shape such a society, whereas the theme of revolution, even when applied to countries which did not experience the destruction of their political institutions, does underline the great strength of a mobilization which serves the cause of progress, accumulation and might.

The long nineteenth century was therefore no longer dominated by the divorce between the world of techniques and the world of consciousness, of objectivity and subjectivity; on the contrary, it strove, with an effort without historical precedent, to make the individual a public being, not in the Athenian or Roman sense of the word or by subordinating the individual to the *polis*, but by overcoming the dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal in the name of the meaning of history, and therefore in the name of the historic mission of every social actor.

This is a military rather than an industrial vision, and it mobilizes rather than organizes. Thanks to an apparent paradox, we have to look to economic life to see the presence of subjectivation. It was dominated rather than being truly suppressed. As we have already seen, subjectivation was of such importance in the pre-revolutionary period that the rationalism of the Enlightenment never succeeded in masking it. For it is not so much self-interest that resists the general mobilization of society, as *labour*. According to Weber's analysis, labour was a calling. Many entrepreneurs acted in its name, and it also became the central justification for the workers' movement. In industrial society, such an appeal to the Subject is inseparable from conflicts over labour. In his own view, the entrepreneur represents labour and reason, as opposed to the routine and traditionalism of wage-earners, whereas militant workers denounce the irrationality of profit and the crises that destroy human labour, which is the productive and progressive force *par excellence*.

The Subject could be shaped by the long-standing Christian tradition only because the Ego was torn between sin and the grace of God; in industrial society it was strengthened by being transformed in to a social movement. At the same time, it risked destruction when that movement became a new emblem of the State, progress and historical necessity, just as the individual risked absorption by divine grace. Once again, the Subject could assert its presence only by taking the risk that it might vanish by becoming either an almost natural force or a power whose legitimacy is based upon natural laws.

Whilst social actors and their conflicts do resist the evolution of the historical totality, it is immediately obvious that there is no solid basis for the identification of economic growth, or in other words industrialization, with national, social and collective action, or of history with the Subject. Historicist thought triumphed in the margins of modernity. It had more difficulty in gaining acceptance in the heartlands of a triumphant industrial capitalism or in countries where the national question was more important than the economic and social question, or even came in to conflict with it. That is why historicism was primarily a German mode of thought which subsequently spread throughout continental Europe during the turmoil brought about by the beginnings of capitalism and the formation of revolutionary movements. It had immense influence across a huge area thanks to Herder, Marx and then Lenin. Yet it had no effect on either Great Britain or the United States, and permeated French political culture to only a limited degree. In nations that were part of the Austro-Hungarian, Turkish or Russian Empires, the struggle for independence often took precedence over the desire for modernity. When, on the eve of the First World War, the Czech workers were forced to decide if they were primarily workers or primarily Czechs, they decided they were first of all Czechs, and national movements were often dominated by the old ruling classes or by intermediary categories whose relationship with modernity was ambiguous. At the opposite extreme, in 'central' countries, the appeal to the market, the concentration of capital and the rationalization of production methods suppressed the idea of modern, or even industrial, society and led to a brutal divorce between public and private life, between modernization and consciousness. Men's dominance over women therefore took an extreme form. Men were identified with public life, whereas women were confined to private life but made up for their lack of rights and power by exercising great authority over their families and the education of their children. Squeezed between a 'savage' capitalism and outbreaks of nationalism, historicist thought and historicist movements always remained fragile. This was especially true in France, which was subject to the rule of both the financial bourgeoisie and the control of a nationalist State. Society enjoyed only a limited autonomy, and social thought was more often a history of the nation than a sociology of modernity, at least until the success of the Durkheimian school, which coincided with the limited emergence of a solidarist politics.

The historicist integration of public and private life thus had an effect on cultural production too. It meant that this was the period of the *roman* – a genre defined by the correspondence between a

biography and a historical situation. Novels lose their power if the central character is no more than a symbol of a collective history or if, conversely, that character lives in a purely private space.

Modernity without Revolution: Tocqueville

To conclude this general description of the idea of progress, we must at least sketch a portrait of someone who rebelled against this progressive philosophy of history. I cannot think of a more interesting example than Tocqueville. He seems at first to share the idea that history has a meaning or direction, that an unavoidable natural necessity governs the transition from aristocracy to democracy, from inequality and barriers between castes and classes to an equality of condition which means not so much the absence of differences as the removal of obstacles to mobility. Tocqueville does not believe that America is different to Europe; he does believe that America provides a clear picture of the future towards which France and Europe are heading in an indirect and very contradictory way. Yet no sooner has he expressed this idea than, in the second volume of *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 1835–40), he gives this evolution a different meaning. Increasing equality leads to the concentration of power. Tocqueville's subsequent argument appealed mainly to aristocrats and all those who remained attached to social and cultural traditions, but it was relevant to all: given that it had rooted out all particularisms, traditions and customs, was not modern society becoming an atomized crowd that gave free reign to absolute power and its excesses? Tocqueville asks himself why America did not succumb to the tyranny of the majority or of a dictator. His initial answer was that it has a federal government, that its provinces and districts are autonomous, and that the judiciary is independent, but these explanations were not enough: these were manifestations of democracy rather than its cause. Tocqueville then comes to the main issue: religion. In chapter IX of the second part of volume one, he asserts that religion introduces the principle of equality between men and then, adopting a more complex argument, claims that by leaving Heaven to deal with the problem of ultimate ends, it limits conflict and, so to speak, secularizes politics. Tocqueville is not indulging in tautology when he states that manners and ideas determine equality, which then defines democracy. Not only is democracy a social phenomenon before it becomes a political phenomenon; it is cultural rather than social. Convictions and manners thus become divorced from social and political organization; they act upon them and can also come in to conflict with certain tendencies within modernity.

Although it was very influential in Great Britain and the United States, Tocqueville's work was for a long time marginal to social thought in France, presumably because it contradicted the integrated and monolithic vision of modernity, and the martial image of wealth, freedom and happiness advancing side by side which had been disseminated and popularized by the ideologies and politics of modernity. Tocqueville completely rejected the revolutionary idea which dominated French thought and asserted that a unitary and voluntarist movement was leading modern society towards freedom and equality. He fully supported the overthrow of the Ancien Régime, but he rejected the Revolution, and to that extent he had a great deal in common with many other thinkers of his day and, as we shall see, with Auguste Comte. He accepted the decline of the *notables* and the intermediary bodies, and the gradual victory of equality, or in other words the lowering of social and cultural barriers. He supported the separation of Church and State, because he had seen its beneficial effects in the United States, but his thought is steeped in the tradition of natural law and Christian spiritualism. Tocqueville dreams retrospectively of an English-style historical continuity which both modernizes and restricts the central power. He adopts Montesquieu's theories and transports them to a new world. He reduces the United States to a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society which was far removed from what it had become since Jackson, and even further removed from what it was at a time when the industrial North was poised to destroy the plantation economy of the South. Current French interest in Tocqueville is part of a broader trend. The political philosophy of the eighteenth century has great attractions for all those who want to escape from the ruins of historicism. Whilst Tocqueville is a post-revolutionary and a convinced believer in the triumph of equality, he is still looking for a force that can resist mass society and its most dangerous product: the concentration of power. He finds that force in 'manners', and therefore in the influence that an ethical and religious conception can have on economic and social organization, as we can see from the titles of the four parts of volume 2, which deal respectively with the influence of democracy, or in other words the spirit of equality, on science and the arts, on opinions and sentiments, on manners and on political society in the United States. The intellectual quality of Tocqueville's analyses does not mean that they are not part of the political culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to which Americans remain more attached than the French. The Subject in whose name Tocqueville challenges economic and political modernization is still the Christian subject whose origins lie, according to Tocqueville, in the irrepressible human need for hope.

What possible influence could such ideas have at a time when philanthropists and socialists were drawing attention to the increase in poverty, when the European and American world was being swept along by an industrial revolution which may not, according to historians, have deserved its name, but which certainly brought about such an upheaval in material and mental life that it was no longer possible to speak of man in general or to investigate the moral or religious foundations of the social order? Our encounter with Tocqueville is therefore a final farewell to the theory of natural law and Christian and Cartesian dualism. The combined effects of the French Revolution and the transformations of the economy that began in Great Britain were sweeping the European world and, before long, the greater part of the planet into a modernity that was not confined to the world of ideas. It created a society and social actors who are defined by their actions rather than by their nature. Political philosophy was giving way to political economy.

Nostalgia for Being

The entry into historicism and the technological world signalled by the upheavals of the French Revolution and industrialization in England provoked more extreme resistance than that put up by Tocqueville, who rejected the Revolution and looked for modernity in the realization of the ideas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The entry into History, the transition from ideas to practices and the untranscendable divide that had been created between phenomena and Being, generated a nostalgia for Being, for the principle behind the unity of the natural world and the human world and therefore behind a rationalist vision. That nostalgia would grow so powerful as to become the principal force behind the intellectual reaction against modernity. In his triumph, Prometheus mourned the lost beauty of Olympus. The disenchantment of the world described by Weber inevitably led to attempts to lend it a new enchantment. Attempts to recreate the pre-revolutionary world of particularisms and privileges were of no great importance. Tocqueville was as well aware as Guizot or Thiers of the futility of these reactionary longings in both the intellectual and the political realm. Attempts to lend the world a new enchantment that took a pre-romantic or *romantic* aesthetic form were much more important. A nostalgia for Being challenged the triumph of modernizing rationality in a very different way to the Cartesian I or the individual rights of theorists of natural law. Germany had not been affected by the political modernization that had transformed Great Britain and then

France, but with Schiller, Hölderlin and then Schelling it saw the rise of a nostalgia for Being that would never disappear from German thought and which was often to take the form of an antimodernist critique, particularly with the Frankfurt School of philosophers in the mid twentieth century.

The Reconstruction of Order

The most elementary form of historicism is obsessed with the idea of destroying the old order and with the search for a new order. This mode of thought is the complete antithesis of that of great liberals like Tocqueville. It does not invent any new relationship between progress and social integration; on the contrary, it distrusts triumphal individualism and, in an attempt to ward off its dangers, invents a new order, a new principle of social integration. Auguste Comte is the best representative of this tendency. A reference to modernity is, however, both central and constant throughout his work, even though it is usually remembered by posterity for the law of the 'three states', which holds that the decline of the theological state and the upheavals of the metaphysical state will be followed by the advent of the positive state. Yet it would be dangerous to see Auguste Comte as the prophet of the victory of the scientific spirit. He is not even convinced that the natural sciences contain any specific truth; it is possible, he says, that there are several specific theories which explain various orders of phenomena without merging in to a general theory of nature. Above all, and like his master Saint-Simon, he is not so much convinced that progress will lead from one state to the next, as aware of the transition from an organic era to a critical era, from community to market individualism. Sociology, which owes its name to Auguste Comte, was to a large extent born of the anxieties of the intellectuals of the post-revolutionary period. Their main concern was to reconstruct order, and this could not mean the order of the Ancien Régime. This preoccupation is constant throughout the whole century. It emerged in Germany when it too was thrown in to turmoil by modernity – Tönnies contrasts community with the emerging society in the hope of finding a way back to community (*Vergemeinschaftung*) – and we can now find it in the work of Louis Dumont, whose holism-individualism dichotomy expresses a fear that individualism will triumph. According to Comte, the jurists of the Revolution replaced the concrete with the abstract and freed the individual, but at the same time condemned the individual to dreams, madness and solitude.

This vision of modernity could not be further removed from the

idea of a personal Subject. Comte wanted to dispel the illusions of individualism and to make the transition from I to We. That is why, the views of Littré and John Stuart Mill notwithstanding, we have to agree with Henri Gouhier (1988) and conclude that there is no real break between the two major stages in Comte's intellectual life. There is no real break between the *Cours de philosophie positive* and the appeal to the religion of humanity which dominates the *Système de politique positive* (Comte 1851-4). The two stages are of course divided by the decisive encounter with Clotilde de Vaux in 1845, but that lasted for only a few months, as she died in 1846. The positivists abandoned the attempt to create a new religion and rejected the claim that 'the living are always, and increasingly, governed by the dead', but Gouhier is quite right to stress that Comte's central idea and the goal of his action is the discovery that the inevitable – but possibly temporary – triumph of individualism would give way to a new principle of social integration. Positivism and the search for social integration converge. Categories which relate to things more directly – the proletariat, women (and especially 'uneducated' women) – have the greatest awareness of the unity of humanity, whereas intellectuals tend to take a metaphysical view of things. More generally, society must be a community or an order, and the supreme virtue of the scientific spirit is that it provides a defence against subjectivity and personal interest. Comte's thought is hostile to social and political struggles because it accords absolute primacy to the creation of an order which allows the human race to become part of the universal tendency to 'preserve and perfect the Great Being'. The positive spirit is therefore, according to Auguste Comte (1844: 56), diametrically opposed to the concern for man displayed by the philosophers of natural law:

Because of its characteristic reality, the positive spirit, in contrast, is directly and effortlessly social, insofar as that is possible. In its view, man does not exist in any real sense; Humanity is the only thing that can exist because we owe our whole development to society, no matter how we look at it. If the idea of society still seems to be an intellectual abstraction, that is mainly because of the philosophical *ancien régime*. Truth to tell, it is the idea of the individual that is abstract, at least insofar as it applies to our species. The whole of the new philosophy will constantly strive to reveal, in both the active and the speculative life, the connection that binds us all together in so many different ways, and to make us unthinkingly familiar with the inner feeling of social solidarity, suitably extended to all times and all places.

What can this Humanity that exists outside individuals be, if not society itself? What can the solidarity that must become the main

source of personal happiness be, if not an equivalent to 'species' amongst other animals? Historicist thought paves the way for this identification of personal freedom with participation in a collectivity, for the anti-Christian and anti-liberal position which subordinates individuals to representatives of society or, to put it in more concrete terms, to those who hold power. In Comte, it also has authoritarian connotations which can be explained in terms of the experience of revolution and the subsequent fear that the breakdown of society would lead to the reign of interest and violence. His attacks on intellectuals, 'men of letters', parliamentary debates and social struggles were to have a long and active posterity, largely because of the idea that true freedom is the product of social integration and that solidarity allows everyone to take part in the life of the whole social body. Whilst it is true that historicism centres on a call for political, social and national mobilization in the service of modernization, the positivists reduce that call to a minimum. Their trust in modernizing leaders is conditional upon their ability to encourage the religion of humanity, which can be regarded as a preliminary – and still utopian – definition of socialism to the extent that it implies a purely social or functional conception of man. This positivism is closer to the sociologism of the political philosophy of Hobbes and Rousseau than to the analysis of the social conflicts of industrial society made by Proudhon and especially Marx. The difference is that political philosophies of modernity legitimized absolute power in order to free society from religious power. After the French Revolution, the goal was to recreate a communitarian power and a religion of progress and society. Like the Saint-Simonianism which provided it with its starting point and which had a more direct influence on the new leaders of industry, positivism soon disintegrated in to an appeal to science and growth on the one hand, and the dream of establishing a new Church on the other. The desire to reconcile reason and faith, which is so similar to that of Michelet, persisted throughout the century, and influences Durkheim's attempts to recreate order within movement, and to ensure organic solidarity within a utilitarian society subject to permanent change.

The 'Beautiful Totality'

The weakness of positivism stems from the fact that it is alien to the cultural traditions it attempts to challenge. It devotes all its energies to the resolution of the contemporary problem of recreating order within movement. And the solution it offers applies only to a society

which can be seen as an organism requiring both a diversity of organs and a unitary life and energy. But what answer does it have to the most important debate in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought: the difficult reconciliation of natural law and individual interest, universals and particulars, reason and sensation? The religion of humanity exists between these two worlds, yet it is difficult to see how it can become established in either of them. Positivist politics therefore had no impact on social practices.

In his formative years, Hegel, in contrast, identified himself with the French Revolution, and personal freedom with the transformation of society. He adopted the revolutionary cry of 'Freedom or death'. And his philosophy is an attempt to synthesize subjectivity and totality by making a twofold critique of an abstract ethics and of a civil society based upon individual interests. The young Hegel initially defines his position by criticizing Kant and abstract morality (*Moralität*). He constructs an ethics or an ethical domain (*Sittlichkeit*), which cannot be separated from institutions, or from active participation in freedom. Citizenship is the highest form of freedom. Hegel is therefore critical of natural law. His central theme is close to Rousseau: the universal can be realized only in the particular, which thus becomes singularity. The history of the world is not a linear evolution, but a sequence of emblematic figures and cultures, each representing the action of the universal within history. Christ is a prime representative of the subjectivity that is inscribed in history, and the French Revolution will be another. Christ destroys Jewish legalism and the correspondence between the spiritual and the temporal that was common to both the Jews and the Greeks. Yet the individuality of Christ also lies in the fulfilment of his messianic destiny, and his sacrifice is an *amor fati*.

History is thus the product of two complementary processes: estrangement and integration. Hegel comes close to the Christian tradition when he writes in the *Phenomenology* (Hegel 1807: 758):

Spirit is knowledge of self in a state of alienation of self: spirit is the being which is the process of retaining identity with itself in its otherness. This, however, is Substance, so far as in its accidents substance at the same time is turned back in to itself; and is so, not as being indifferent towards something unessential and, consequently, as finding itself in some alien element, but as being there within itself, i.e. so far as it is subject or self.

The same point is made in still more general terms in the 'Preface' (Hegel 1807: 80): everything depends upon 'grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance but as Subject as well'.

This alienation and the birth of subjectivation that results from it also leads, however, to mediations and thus to the integration of will and necessity. Their complete reconciliation comes about when freedom exists both as reality, as necessity and as subjective will. What being can achieve this concrete freedom? The citizen, as created by the French Revolution. This citizen is, however, also a citizen of a concrete historical nation or *Volk*. In this sense, Hegel is a successor to both Herder and Luther and the ancestor of the culturalists who reject the abstract universalism of reason. They do not resist it in the name of an unrestricted theory of difference which quickly becomes both absurd and destructive, but in the name of the idea, which is of central importance to Herder, that every nation and every culture with any historical reality can participate in the progress or reason, and has the right to do so.

It is at this point that Hegel departs furthest from eighteenth-century French thought and its individualism, and is most consciously true to the German notion of Development. The Subject is not an abstract being. It is present in collective achievements and collective life, and especially in the great religions which have marked the development of humanity. Humanity moves from one historical figure to the next, and not from one level of rationalization to the next. Hegel thus rejects the dualism that dominated philosophical thought from Descartes to Kant and, therefore, moralistic judgements on history. He comes close to the preoccupations of his own day when he sees in civil society the subordination of man to the laws of production and labour, and looks to citizenship, and therefore to a relationship with the State, to remedy that dependency. That idea still prevails today as sections of both the Left and the Right identify the State with history and reduce social life to the defence of immediate interests, and thus reintroduce a new dualism which is as dangerous as Christian dualism was liberating. The individual is no longer an embodiment of universal values; the State realizes them in history. Civil society must be transcended or, to put it in concrete terms, controlled by the State. This vision has a tragic grandeur; it is the story of a hero for whom death is the realization of a destiny, just as it was for Christ. Christ is the exemplary representative of the unhappy consciousness: he internalizes the fall of the world, but fulfils the will of his Father in doing so. Hegel does not go back beyond Christianity to the Greek *polis*, or to the identification of man with citizen. He concentrates on Christianity, on the moment of the divorce between the temporal and the spiritual, of the substitution of morality for faith. The creation of a private religion is seen as the birth of the subjectivity without which Spirit cannot exist for itself.

Spirit can only encounter itself by becoming divided, by breaking with nature and by becoming freedom.

And yet, asks Marx, does not Hegel reconcile totality and alienation only in the form of ideas? Does not the theme of estrangement and subjectivity lead to that of struggles between masters and slaves? At the same time, the reference to totality is transformed in to either the creation of an absolute power (a successor to Rousseau's general will), or the absorption of all historical actors in to Absolute Spirit. Hegel's own work thus ceases to be a philosophy of history and becomes a philosophy of Mind which elevates art, religion and philosophy above social life.

Hegel's philosophy may not have to choose between a rightist interpretation that sees the State as the realization of Spirit, and a leftist interpretation that transforms the estrangement of Spirit in to real contradictions between nature and society, reason and profit, and challenges the cultural and religious ideologies that conceal this truly social struggle. It is, however, difficult to apply such philosophical ideas to historical practices without introducing a contradiction between the assertion of subjectivity and the movement towards totality, and thus destroying historicism's dream of uniting Subject and history. The same agonizing struggle can be found in Marxism, which is both an economic determinism and a call for liberating action on the part of the proletariat.

No one pursued the intellectual ambitions of historicism further than Hegel, and no one did more to integrate the two intellectual traditions of the pre-revolutionary period, namely a vision of the Subject and a belief in progress and reason. His philosophy of history has a tragic power and it is closer to the Christian history of the redemption than to the intellectual optimism of a Condorcet. After Hegel, it is no longer possible, as it was in the eighteenth century, to speak of social actors in ahistorical terms. Both reason and the Subject have become history.

Praxis

The most dangerous aspect of historicist thought is the subordination of social actors to the State, which is seen as the agent of historical transformation. Subjectivity is seen merely as a necessary moment in the emergence of 'mind objective' and then Absolute Spirit. There is an underlying tendency in historicism to speak in the name of a Subject identified with history, and to eliminate subjects, or in other words the actors who are trying to transform their situation in order to gain greater freedom.

The historicist thought of Marx, Hegel and Comte introduces the idea that men make their own history only to destroy it, for history is the history of reason or, and this is merely a different version of the same general belief, of a progression towards the transparency of nature. The thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century was dominated by the encounter between reason and the Subject, between utilitarianism and natural law; the historicism of the nineteenth century absorbs the Subject in to reason, freedom in to historical necessity, and society in to the State.

It is in the thought of Marx that the philosophy of history achieves its most tragic vision of the contradiction between its liberating force and the subordination of the subject to History. No other tendency within social thought asserts with such force that men make their own history. Marx's first impulse is to look for the practices that lie behind the abstract categories of religion, law and politics. This is why, as we have already seen, he denounces the priority given to political categories in France. He regards Robespierre's doctrinarianism and Napoleon's autocracy as masking the triumph of bourgeois idealism just as he sees the leftist rhetoric of the leaders of the Commune as masking the weakness of the French working class, and the juridical category of property as concealing labour and social relations of production. No matter whether he is speaking as an economist, a philosopher or a leader of the International, Marx constantly refers to the 'positive humanism' which will result in 'the destruction of the *estranged* character of the objective world', as he puts it in the third of the *1844 Manuscripts* (Marx 1844: 395).

Marx is the sociologist of industrialization. He is discussing a society which is dominated by the factory and not the market. He is not preaching the respect for the rule of law, and therefore of ethics, which would ensure the peace and justice that are essential to trade; he is observing an industrial world in which men are reduced to the status of commodities, in which wages tend to fall to a level which will merely ensure biological reproduction of the labour force, and in which man's 'species-being' is destroyed by the domination of money, objects and individualist ideologies. The highest expression of this vision is to be found in the 'Theses on Feuerbach', and especially in their opening sentence: 'The chief defect of all previous materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively' (Marx 1845: 421). 'Practice' means primarily the social relations of production. The social science of action was born of texts like this. Even though the collapse of historicism, especially in the

last quarter of the twentieth century, makes Marx's thought seem remote indeed, we still have to recognize its greatness.

What is this Subject, this species-being or social being which is alienated or exploited? Being an economist and a political militant, Marx gives central importance to absolute proletarianization, and to the contradiction between the situation of the proletariat and human creativity. This is an objective contradiction rather than an actual conflict, as there was as yet little conflict in a society where the workers' movement was still far from being an important and autonomous actor. Marx's thought is not an analysis of social conflicts, but an analysis of the contradiction between the productive forces and the totality on the one hand, and between class domination and individualist ideology on the other. Marx looks to nature to defeat capitalism, and not to a social movement. The action of proletarians and their International cannot be a set of demands put forward by an interest group in the name of its rights: it is quite the opposite, namely the transformation of alienated workers in to a force that can shatter these contradictions, and the sole basis for its capacity for action is its support for productive forces which have been imprisoned by capitalism. There will be no movement unless it serves the cause of progress, and progress itself means progress towards totality, or in other words towards the liberation of nature, of the productive forces and, at a still deeper level, human needs.

At no point does Marx found a sociology of social movements, even though he makes such a sociology possible with his destructive critique of 'institutional' illusions and his constant reminders that practice is primary. Their complete alienation prevents the workers from becoming the actors of their own history. The destruction of capitalist domination will not bring about the triumph of a dominated actor who, according to the Proudhonist vision, takes control over production. It will bring about the abolition of classes and the triumph of nature. Marx's thought by no means anticipates the reformist or social-democratic vision of working-class, trade-union and political action as promoting the rights of the workers and strengthening their influence over economic and social decisions. Its radicalism is so extreme that it sees all institutions and all ideologies as concealing interest and domination. It believes that capitalist exploitation can be fought only by the irrepressible power of nature, progress and nature, and by the pressure of human needs.

Marx's thought eliminates the social actor. It contains no reference to either the eighteenth-century vision of man as ethical being, or a social movement guided by the values of freedom and justice. Some may find these words disturbing. Marx was, after all, the most active

leader of the International Working Men's Association and the most constant adversary of the subordination of the labour movement to political action. These are valid objections, but they are no argument against the interpretation given here. Marx believes that nature, rather than social action, is the force that will overcome the contradictions of class society. He has much more in common with the great destroyers of the idea of modernity – Nietzsche and Freud, whom we will meet in part II – than with the revolutionary syndicalists.

That is the concrete meaning of the historical materialism expounded in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1845–6). Its classic expression can be found in the preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1859: 20–1):

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter in to definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and which correspond definite forms of social consciousness . . . It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come in to conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn in to their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.

These last words of the *Critique* state (1859: 21): 'Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve' – a formula which will justify the economism of the Second International and of the many reformers who, whilst they are opposed to violent revolutionary action, share its view, which is common to every manifestation of historicist thought, that the meaning of action lies in historical evolution. That evolution will lead to the liberation of nature or a return to nature, and not to the construction of an institutional and ethical world based upon absolute principles.

Marx is eminently modern in that he defines society as a historical product of human activity, and not as a system organized around cultural values or even a social hierarchy. He does not, however, equate the modernist vision with individualism; on the contrary, the man he describes is primarily a social man who is defined by his position in a mode of production, in a technical world and in property relations. He is defined by social relations rather than by the rational

pursuit of his interests. Social man cannot be described in terms of the holism-individualism dichotomy, Louis Dumont's efforts notwithstanding. Social man escapes both categories, as neither defines human beings in truly social terms.

Marx does not in fact defend the 'rights of man' or the ethical Subject. The alienating constructs of the social order are contrasted with human need, and it may already be possible to equate this need with what Nietzsche and then Freud will call the Id. Historicism eliminates Christianity's ethical God. It initially replaces God with a mere will to reconcile progress with order. At a less superficial level, Hegel then replaces God with the dialectic that will lead to the triumph of Absolute Spirit. By giving more importance to social and economic practices, Marx transforms the dialectic in to a rational and natural drive which will demolish the defences erected by the ruling class and its agents. An obsession with totality is central to all these intellectual endeavours, and totality is the meaningful principle that replaces both divine revelation and natural law. None of them makes allowance for the appearance within civil society of the social actor, initially in the form of the bourgeois and then in that of the workers' movement. Historicism does indeed subordinate History to a philosophy of History, and the social to the non-social, which it variously defines as reason, spirit or nature.

This vision of society is perfectly in keeping with the experience of the first industrial societies, which were dominated by an almost unfettered capitalism, but it also makes an essential contribution to the theory of the personal Subject. Even though working-class action cannot, according to Marx, be successful unless it moves in the same direction as History, it does make it impossible to represent society as either a machine or an organism. The elimination of God and the rejection of social utilitarianism opens up two avenues for the assertion of freedom: either a return to Being through art, sexuality or philosophy, or an assertion of the Subject and the freedom is not embodied in a struggle against the dominant forces. Marx, like Nietzsche, rejects any appeal to the Subject, but the workers' movement, from which his work is inseparable, was, once the bourgeois revolutions had run their course, the principal expression of the appeal to the Subject. As in so many other cases, practice was ahead of theory.

Practice was, however, usually crushed by theory and the political action it inspired. Political leaders increasingly claimed to have a monopoly on transforming of the action of the proletariat and oppressed nations – which in itself, they claimed, could never be

anything more than the negation of the negation – in to positive action which could reconcile man and nature, will and reason. Marxism rarely leads to a sociology of collective action. It is in fact precisely because Marxism has produced so few analyses of collective action and social movements that we have to recognize the lasting importance of Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (Lukács 1923). Written shortly after the First World War, his book, which is at once central and marginal, marks the end of the history of Hegelian Marxism and foreshadows the triumph of totalitarianism. According to Lukács, the bourgeoisie is aware of its interests and does have a subjective class consciousness, but does not, and refuses to have, any consciousness of the *totality* of the historical process. It had such a consciousness when it was struggling against feudalism; it loses it when it is attacked by the proletariat, and therefore cannot analyse social relations because it divorces the objective from the subjective. The proletariat, in contrast, does achieve a class consciousness, but in Lukács's view this is by no means a class subjectivity. On the contrary, it means the identification of the interests of the proletariat with historical necessity. 'The proletariat is, then, at one and the same time the product of the permanent crisis in capitalism and the instrument of those tendencies which drive capitalism towards crisis' (Lukács 1923: 40). The same point is later made (1923: 177) with even greater clarity: 'This consciousness is nothing but the expression of historical necessity. The proletariat "has no ideals to realize".' Lukács then adds (1923: 178) that the proletariat 'can never "in practice" ignore the course of history, forcing upon it what are no more than its own desires or knowledge. For it is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious.'

Praxis is neither the mere defence of interests nor the pursuit of an ideal. It identifies the interests of a class with its destiny or with a historical necessity. Being exploited, alienated and repressed, the workers can no more spontaneously arrive at this consciousness of the totality than can any other social category. It is the revolutionary party that embodies consciousness-in-itself. Only the Party can bring about the extraordinary inversion that transforms a totally alienated class in to a revolutionary actor capable of completely rejecting class society and liberating humanity. At the time when he wrote these pages, Lukács was a member of the Communist Party and had been a minister in Béla Kun's government, but he had also defended the workers' councils. His Leninism therefore must not be caricatured, but he does say that: 'The revolutionary victory of the proletariat does not imply, as with former classes, *the immediate realization of the socially given existence of the class*, but, as the young Marx clearly

saw and defined, its *self-annihilation*' (Lukács 1923: 71). According to Lukács himself, it is not the masses, but a Party which understands the meaning of history and which is guided by revolutionary intellectuals, that brings about the transition to the consciousness of totality which turns the proletariat in to a Subject-object whose praxis transforms reality. '*The proletariat only perfects itself by annihilating and transcending itself, by creating the classless society through the successful conclusion of its own class struggle.*' All these formulations, which are central to not only Lukács's thought but to revolutionary Marxist thought as such, despite the debates between competing tendencies, justify the absolute power of the revolutionary Party. The Party is the agent of a historic mutation, of the transition from a class society to a classless society.

Some were still more radical, like Régis Debray in his *Revolution in the Revolution?* (Debray 1967), and the theorists of the *foco revolucionario*. In their view, the dependency of Latin America – and other regions – on imperialism was so complete that not only mass action but even the existence of a revolutionary party was impossible. Only the armed action of a mobile guerrilla force could attack imperialism's weakest link: the corrupt and repressive national State. Its mobility meant that it had no roots in the population. The divorce between the working class or the peasantry, and the revolutionary has never been more complete. Guevara launched his anti-imperialist struggle in Bolivia without reaching any agreement with either the miners, who were the main trade-union power in the country, or the Communist Party. He based his guerrillas in a rural area where the farmers spoke Guarani rather than Spanish; they had also enjoyed the benefits of agricultural reform. As a result, he was soon defeated and killed. Intellectuals and other political militants joined guerrilla campaigns in many countries where they had no social roots, and the victory that was achieved in Cuba inevitably led to a dictatorship without the proletariat. This is the example that proves the rule, but it does bring out the logic of revolutionary Marxist action. It is true that its triumph did bring about the transition from a class society to a classless society, but the abolition of classes worked to the advantage of absolute power and its apparatus. They exercised a permanent terror which eventually became more technocratic and bureaucratic, but Cuba remained a police-state opposed to the autonomy of social actors and their freedom of expression.

Marxist thought cannot lead to the formation of a social movement. Socialism, in the form given it by Marxism – and this is its most influential form – was not the political wing of the workers' movement; that role was played by social democracy. The workers'

movement sought to give a social actor the ability to act autonomously, and that presupposed a reliance upon ethical principles of equality and justice which could create a democratic politics. Marxist socialism, in contrast, is hostile to class subjectivity and alien to democracy, and is concerned less with justice than with the fulfilment of a historic destiny. Even though Marx, like Hegel before him, was aware that he was constructing a philosophy of the Subject, he understood it to mean something very different to our modern understanding of subjectivity or subjectivation, or even freedom and responsibility. Lukács was quite right to say that 'it is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality' (Lukács 1923: 27). No individual actor can adopt this point of view; it is inevitably that of a truly political agent of historical necessity who seizes absolute power in order to realize that necessity.

Whilst subjectivity appears to be bourgeois, visions which appeal to a historical totality, be they revolutionary or petty-bourgeois, as Mathiez liked to say of Michelet, identify a class or a nation with the natural movement of history, and therefore with an idea, that real social actors are no longer anything more than references. At the level of practice, they are the 'masses', and they need a party of intellectuals to speak in their name. The vision of a humanity which creates its own history and overthrows the deceptive illusions of essences and the principles of law and ethics in order to understand and transform itself through its practices, leads to the subordination – violent or moderate, totalitarian or bureaucratic – of social actors, and particularly classes, to the absolute power of a political elite which proclaims its legitimacy in the name of its supposed understanding of the laws of History.

Farewell to Revolution

We now know from experience that progress, the people and the nation do not fuse in to a revolutionary enthusiasm or a historical force against which the barriers erected by money, religion and law are powerless. The historic synthesis dreamed of the age of revolutions was never spontaneously realized, Michelet's dreams notwithstanding. It simply gave birth to the absolute power of revolutionary leaders who identified with the purity and unity of the Revolution. The unity of the historical process was realized only through the replacement of a plurality of social actors and the complexity of their relations with the One of the nation, of the people or of a

besieged community under martial law, and where traitors had to be punished.

Revolutions have always turned their back on democracy and imposed unity – and it is inevitably the unity of a dictatorship – on the diversity of a class-divided society. Indeed, it was precisely because social actors failed to take an active role in public life – even in France where universal suffrage was introduced in 1848 – that the political elite was able to establish its domination over the people and over social classes. The process began with the Terror and was made permanent by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

If we accept for a moment the idea, which I defend throughout this book, that modernity is defined by an increasing divorce between rationalization and subjectivation, it is clear that the affirmation of the basic unity of the natural laws of history and collective action implies a rejection of modernity. If that affirmation is not confined to a small circle of ideologues, it inevitably leads to the construction of an absolute and repressive power. That power then imposes an artificial and authoritarian unity on both the world of the economy, which thus loses its internal rationality, and the world of social actors, who are denied their identity in the name of their universal mission. The era of Revolutions led by tortuous paths to the Terror, to the repression of the people in the name of the people, and to the execution of revolutionaries in the name of the revolution. Because it asserts the unity of modernity and social mobilization, it leads to economic failure and to the disappearance of society, which is devoured by a Saturn-like State.

The triumph of progress necessarily leads to this naturalization of society. Anyone who opposes modernity and its revolution is therefore regarded as an obstacle, as an anti-social element who must be eliminated by skilled gardeners with a talent for weeding. Modernity completely self-destructs at the very moment when ideology is loudly equating a will with a necessity, when it is turning history in to both a progression towards freedom and the liberation of nature, when it thinks it can bring about the triumph of the social by dissolving it in the cosmos. This extreme idea of modernity has never become completely dominant in the most active centres of Western modernization, where political power has not gained control over the economy and culture, but as modernization spreads to the regions where it encounters the greatest obstacles, it becomes increasingly voluntarist and is increasingly identified with the revolutionary idea.

The first duty of today's intellectuals is therefore to proclaim that the great historicist synthesis was a dangerous dream and that revolution has always been the antithesis of democracy. Modernity

does not mean the triumph of the One. Modernity means that the One disappears and is replaced by the management of the difficult but necessary relationship between rationalization, and individual and collective freedom.

Christian thought and natural law were defeated by the philosophy of the Enlightenment. We therefore have to ask ourselves what form the return to subjectivity will take now that historicism has been defeated. The formula has at least two advantages. The first is that it distances us from both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and therefore obliges us to accept both the appeal to reason and the liberation of the personal Subject. The second is that we have to situate our arguments in historical terms. This obviously does not mean situating them in terms of a sequence of forms of modernization or stages of economic growth. It means that we must look for forms of self-production of society which will provide a new definition of relations between efficacy and freedom. As we have seen, modernism initially prioritized the destruction of the past, liberation and openness. Philosophies of history and progress then gave modernity a positive content. They called it 'totality', and the word is close enough to 'totalitarianism' for its ambiguities and dangers to be obvious. Is it possible to conceive of a new historical situation, of a new type of society in which modernity is defined, not in terms of a single and totalizing principle, but in terms of new tensions between rationalization and subjectivation?