DURKHEIM'S 'INDIVIDUALISM AND THE INTELLECTUALS'

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THERE are a number of reasons for translating and republishing Emile Durkheim's article 'L'Individualisme et les Intellectuels'.[1] It is a little known and highly inaccessible theoretical essay by a great sociologist, written in response to a major social and political crisis occurring before his eyes while he was at the height of his powers. It is of value, in the first place, as a contribution to political theory, to the history of ideas and to the study of ideology. Secondly, it is of historical interest as one of the most clear-headed and probing statements of *Dreyfusiste* principles. Thirdly, it sheds light on the ideas of its author.

I

As a piece of political theory, it is an eloquent defence of liberalism, which confronts the central issues of the moral basis of individual rights, the limits of political obligation, the legitimacy of authority, the responsibility of intellectuals and the positive implications of liberalism. Durkheim derives individual rights from an overriding principle of respect for persons, according to which the 'human person . . . is considered as sacred . . .', and which has the status of a moral, even religious absolute. This principle sets limits to political obligation, for, unlike utilitarian doctrines, it is uncompromising in the defence of individual liberties: there is 'no reason of State which can excuse an outrage against the person when the rights of the person are placed above the State'. As to the legitimacy of authority, he argues as an intransigent rationalist: where special competence is in question, deference to expert opinion is rationally justified; where what is at issue pertains to 'the common judgement of men', such deference is contrary to reason and duty. Here, indeed, lies the peculiar responsibility of the intellectual: to apply rational judgement to a problem of 'practical morality', in the face of 'the enthusiasms of the crowd' and 'the prestige of authority'. Finally, Durkheim seeks to draw out the full implications of a commitment to individual liberty, arguing that negative eighteenth-century liberalism was merely the necessary pre-condition for subsequent progress and must be 'enlarged and completed': political liberties must be put to use by working towards economic and social justice.

[1] *Revue Bleue*, 4e série, 10 (1898), pp. 7–13. I am grateful to Durkheim's grandson, M. Etienne Halphen, for kindly giving copyright permission.

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The essay's contribution to the history of ideas is as a sketch of the intellectual and ideological tradition from which these ideas derive. He draws a sharp distinction between 'the narrow utilitarianism and utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists', that 'narrow commercialism which reduces society to nothing more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange', on the one hand, and, on the other, 'another individualism', that 'of Kant and Rousseau, that of the *spiritualistes*, that which the Declaration of the Rights of Man sought, more or less successfully, to translate into formulae....' He seeks to relate not only his own thought but the 'moral catechism' of Third Republic France to the latter of these traditions and argues that it is as alive to social necessities as it is to individual rights. He further argues that it itself originated within Christianity, of which it is the natural development: the *anti-Dreyfusards* were wrong to 'present individualist morality as antagonistic to Christian morality; quite the contrary, it is derived from it'.

The relevance of Durkheim's essay to the study of ideology lies in his sociological conception of individualism as a set of operative ideals, moral beliefs and practices, indeed as a religion (a 'system of collective beliefs and practices that have a special authority'), which he treats as 'a social product, like all moralities and all religions' and sees as peculiarly adapted and functional to his own society, though the sentiments underlying it are weakened by every violation of an individual's rights. Durkheim here offers a summary account of the genesis of individualism in terms of cultural adaptation to population growth, geographical expansion and increasing social differentiation.[1] He further argues that it is 'the doctrine that is currently necessary', the only ideology ultimately capable of ensuring the cohesion of a complex industrial society—and above all France, where 'the individualist cause is truly national'. Thus, by an ingenious inversion of the characteristic *anti-Dreyfusard* argument that the unity, indeed the very survival, of the nation were being threatened for the sake of one individual's rights, Durkheim argues that 'the individualist, who defends the rights of the individual, defends at the same time the vital interests of society'. A religion which tolerates sacrilege loses its authority, and since the religion of the individual is 'the sole link which binds us one to another, such a weakening cannot take place without the onset of social dissolution'.

II

Considered historically, 'Individualism and the Intellectuals' is an authentic expression of the views and attitudes of the *Dreyfusard* 'intellectuals'. It exhibits to the full that high-minded moralizing and contempt for their opponents characteristic of many of the academic supporters of Dreyfus

[1] It differs from the account offered in *The Division of Labour* in laying much greater stress on the role of ideology in maintaining the cohesion of industrial societies.

which so incensed the *anti-Dreyfusards*, from the hooligans who broke up their lectures to sophisticated men of letters who scorned them in print. Catholic polemicists pilloried the 'ignoble race of these academics . . . who spend their lives teaching error and in corrupting souls, and, in due course, society as a whole'.[1] They were the 'atheistic educators of the young, agents of social harm . . . the main source of evil, the true enemies of social order'.[2] For Maurice Barrès,

> the great culprits, who should be punished, are the 'intellectuals', the 'anarchists of the lecture platform', the 'metaphysicians of sociology'. A band of arrogant madmen. Men who take a criminal self-satisfaction in their intelligence, who treat our generals as idiots, our social institutions as absurd and our traditions as unhealthy . . .[3]

To Ferdinand Brunetière, the distinguished literary historian and critic, and one of the immortals of the strongly *anti-Dreyfusard Académie Française*, the very word 'intellectual' proclaimed 'one of the most ridiculous eccentricities of our time—I mean the pretension of rising writers, scientists, professors and philologists to the rank of supermen'.[4]

Early in 1898, Brunetière published an article entitled 'Après le Procès'[5] in which he defended the army and the social order, threatened by 'individualism' and 'anarchy', and poured scorn on 'various intellectuals' who had presumed to doubt the justice of Dreyfus's trial. It was Brunetière's article which provoked Durkheim, who was an active *Dreyfusard*[6] and a Jew, to defend 'the state of mind of the "intellectuals", the fundamental ideas to which they adhere' in the article republished here. It is worth looking briefly at the background and content of Brunetière's article.

After Emile Zola's 'J'accuse' (indicting Esterhazy's judges, the officers who had directed the investigation of Dreyfus, the chiefs of the general staff, the handwriting experts, and various departments of the War Ministry), the intellectuals—artists, men of letters, scientists, lawyers and professors—had publicly declared themselves. The 'Manifesto of the Intellectuals', published in *L'Aurore* the day after 'J'accuse', stated:

[1] Renaud, *La Conquête Protestante*, p. 378, cited in R. H. Soltau, *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1931; republished New York, 1959), pp. 354–5.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Scènes et Doctrines du Nationalisme* (Paris, 1902), Livre 2e, pp. 209–10. Barrès defined an intellectual as an 'individual who persuades himself that society must be based on logic and who fails to recognise that it rests in fact on necessities that are anterior and perhaps foreign to the reason of the individual' (ibid., p. 45).

[4] M. Paléologue, *Journal de l'Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, 1966), pp. 90–1. For discussions of the *Dreyfusard* intellectuals and attacks on them, see V. Brombert, *The Intellectual Hero: 1880–1955* (London, 1962), Chap. 2; R. Gauthier, *Dreyfusards* (Paris, 1965); L. A. Coser, *Men of Ideas* (New York, 1965), pp. 207–26; and J. Kayser, *The Dreyfus Affair* (tr. London, 1931), especially p. 183.

[5] *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 4e période, 146, 67e année (15 March, 1898), pp. 428–46.

[6] Durkheim was general secretary of the Bordeaux section of the *Ligue pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*. Brunetière belonged for a time to the *Ligue de la Patrie Française*.

We the undersigned protest against the violation of judicial procedure and against the mystery surrounding the Esterhazy affair and persist in demanding Revision.[1]

A few days later, various members of the *Institut* presented a petition to the Chamber of Deputies in support of Zola. The second, ultimately victorious phase of the *Dreyfusard* campaign had begun. It was in this context that Brunetière enthusiastically took up the battle with the intellectuals.

He addressed himself to three questions: the causes of anti-Semitism, the place of the army in a democracy, and the claims of the 'intellectuals'. Concerning the first, he advanced the remarkable argument that it was science, or rather pseudo-science, that had first given rise to anti-Semitism by postulating the inequality of races: anthropologists, ethnographers, linguists, historians and critics had lent their authority to this hypothesis which had then passed into the popular imagination. He argued, further, that the prejudice against Freemasons, Protestants and Jews was a natural and legitimate reaction to their 'domination' in the spheres of politics, law, education and administration, and that the Jews themselves were partly responsible for anti-Semitism.

Secondly, Brunetière argued that the army was vital for French security, prosperity, and democracy. It was incompatible only with individualism and anarchy, such as that advanced by Herbert Spencer, who argued that the military profession was an anachronistic survival of barbarism in the age of industry and commerce. On the contrary, war and diplomacy were still 'the keystone of social equilibrium'.[2] The mass of the people had rightly sensed during Dreyfus's trial that 'the army of France, today as of old, is France herself . . . our armies have made us what we are . . . it is in their blood . . . that national unity has been formed, cemented and consolidated'.[3] Its composition was truly national, its spirit honourable and its discipline humane; with national service it had even become a 'school of equality'.[4]

The individualism and anarchy which threatened the army and all that it represented were primarily to be found among 'various intellectuals'—persons who, in virtue of some specialized knowledge, were assumed to have some special authority in all matters, including 'the most delicate questions concerning human morality, the life of nations and the interests of society'.[5] Such an assumption was unfounded and dangerous, and the danger was only increased by their appeal to 'science' to support their purely individual opinions. Grand phrases like 'the scientific method, aristocracy of intelligence, respect for truth' only served to conceal the pretensions of 'Individualism', which was

the great sickness of the present time. . . . Each of us has confidence only in himself, sets himself up as the sovereign judge of everything and does not even allow

[1] 14 January 1898. [2] Art. cit., p. 437. [3] Ibid., p. 440.
[4] Ibid., p. 441. [5] Ibid., p. 444.

his opinion to be discussed. Don't tell this biologist that human affairs are not amenable to his scientific 'methods'; he will laugh at you! Don't confront this palaeographer with the judgement of three court-martials; he knows what the justice of men is, and, anyway, is he not the director of the *Ecole Nationale de Chartes*? And this man, the first person in the world to scan the verses of Plautus, how can you expect him to bend his 'logic' at the word of an army general? One does not spend one's life in studies of that importance in order to think 'like everyone else'; and the true intellectual could not behave like just anyone. He is Nietzsche's 'superman' or 'the enemy of laws' who was not made for laws but rather to rise above them; and we others, mediocre as we are, have only to admire and be grateful! I am merely pointing out that when intellectualism and individualism reach this degree of self-infatuation, one must expect them to be or become nothing other than *anarchy*—perhaps we are not yet at this point, but we are rapidly approaching it.[1]

For the past hundred years, the intellectuals had caused a great deal of harm and they were 'capable of causing us still more'.[2] Moreover, recent events had shown 'the ways in which their self-satisfaction is truly anti-social'.[3]

III

Durkheim's reply to Brunetière offers a conclusive refutation, if such is needed, of a certain interpretation of him as fundamentally anti-liberal and anti-individualistic, as a right-wing nationalist, a spiritual ally of Charles Maurras and a forerunner of a twentieth-century nationalism and totalitarianism—an interpretation that relied on a selective misreading of certain of his writings and, in some cases, a mistaken importation into his centralized guild Socialism of the connotations of Fascist corporatism.[4]

The essay sheds light on Durkheim's thought in two more particular respects. In the first place, it shows how he came to conceive of the '*conscience collective*' in an industrial society. Such a society required the functional equivalent of a religion to cohere, and he conceived this as an ideology sanctifying the values of liberalism and pointing towards Socialism. His viewpoint was that of a late nineteenth-century liberal Socialist, most sympathetic to the reformist ideas of Jean Jaurès, who also saw socialism as the logical extension of individualism.[5] It is, incidentally, reasonable to guess that the plea in the last paragraph for someone to combine and lead the

[1] Art. cit., p. 445. [2] Ibid., p. 446. [3] Ibid.

[4] See, e.g., D. Parodi, *La Philosophie Contemporaine en France* (2nd ed., Paris, 1920), Chap. V; and M. M. Mitchell, 'Emile Durkheim and the Philosophy of Nationalism', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 46, 1931, pp. 87–106. In *A Generation of Materialism* (New York and London, 1941), C. J. H. Hayes describes Durkheim as one of the 'sources . . . of totalitarian nationalism' (p. 247).

[5] See A. Noland, 'Individualism in Jean Jaurès' Socialist Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 22, 1961, pp. 63–80. Cf. Jaurès' statement: '*Le socialisme est l'individualisme logique et complet*' ('Socialisme et Liberté', *La Revue de Paris*, Vol. 23, December 1898, p. 499, cited in ibid., p. 74).

Dreyfusard forces into the struggle was directed at Jaurès. There is, in any case, some reason to suppose that Durkheim was among those who eventually convinced Jaurès that principles of liberty and justice were at stake.[1]

Secondly, Durkheim's sociological account of individualism ('a social institution like all known religions') is the clearest instance of the way in which he saw sociology, and in particular the sociology of morality, as going beyond the social philosophy and philosophical ethics of the past, by treating moral beliefs and practices as social facts. The individual, he argued,

> receives from society even the moral beliefs which deify him. This is what Kant and Rousseau did not understand. They wished to deduce their individualist ethics not from society but from the notion of the isolated individual.

Thus, he maintained, it is 'possible, without contradiction, to be an individualist while asserting that the individual is a product of society, rather than its cause'. He sought in this way to cut the conceptual knot that has frequently been held to tie methodological individualism to liberalism,[2] asserting both the autonomy of sociology and the sacredness of the individual.

'INDIVIDUALISM AND THE INTELLECTUALS'[3]

The question which, for six months now, has so grievously divided the country is in the process of transformation; having begun as a simple question of fact, it has become more and more general in scope. The recent intervention of a well-known *littérateur*[4] has contributed greatly to this development. It seems to have been felt that the time had come to renew with a great fanfare a controversy that was dying out through repetition. That is why, instead of returning yet again to a discussion of the facts, that writer wanted, in one leap, to rise immediately to the level of principles: the state of mind of the 'intellectuals',[5] the fundamental ideas to which they adhere, and no longer the detail of their arguments, is what has been attacked. If they obstinately refuse 'to bend their logic at the word of an army general', this is, evidently, because they have arrogated to themselves the right to judge the matter; they are putting their own reason above authority, and the rights of

[1] Personal communication to the writer by Durkheim's nephew, M. Henri Durkheim. There is, however, no independent confirmation of this.

[2] Cf. the contemporary writings of Sir Karl Popper and Professor Hayek.

[3] The present translation is by S. and J. Lukes (Ed., *Political Studies*).

[4] See the article by M. Brunetière: 'Après le procès', in *Revue des Deux Mondes* of 15 March 1898. (This note and the subsequent ones are Durkheim's. Ed., *Political Studies*.)

[5] Let us note in passing that this word, which is most appropriate, does not properly have the pejorative meaning that has so maliciously been attributed to it. The intellectual is not a person who has a monopoly of understanding (*intelligence*); there are no social functions where understanding is unnecessary. But there are those in which it is at once both the means and the end, the instrument and the goal. Here understanding is used to extend understanding, that is to say, to enrich it with knowledge, ideas, and new sensations. It is thus the basis of these professions (art, science) and it is in order to express this peculiarity that it has come to be natural to call those who practise them intellectuals.

the individual appear to them to be imprescriptible. It is, therefore, their individualism which has brought about their schism. But in that case, it has been said, if one wants to restore peace to men's minds and prevent the return of similar discords, it is this individualism which must be directly confronted. This inexhaustible source of domestic divisions must be silenced once and for all. And a veritable crusade has begun against this public scourge, 'this great sickness of the present time'.

We fully agree to conducting the debate in these terms. We too believe that the controversies of yesterday were only superficial expressions of a deeper disagreement; and that men's minds have been divided much more over a question of principle than over a question of fact. Let us therefore leave on one side the minutely detailed arguments which have been exchanged from side to side; let us forget the Affair itself and the melancholy scenes we have witnessed. The problem confronting us goes infinitely beyond the current events and must be disengaged from them.

I

There is a preliminary ambiguity which must be cleared up first of all.

In order to facilitate the condemnation of individualism, it has been confused with the narrow utilitarianism and utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists. This is to take the easy way out. It is not hard, in effect, to denounce as an ideal without grandeur that narrow commercialism which reduces society to nothing more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange, and it is only too clear that all social life would be impossible if there did not exist interests superior to the interests of individuals. Nothing is more just than that such doctrines should be treated as anarchical, and with this attitude we are in full agreement. But what is inadmissible is that this individualism should be presented as the only one that there is or even that there could be. Quite the contrary; it is becoming more and more rare and exceptional. The practical philosophy of Spencer is of such moral poverty that it now has scarcely any supporters. As for the economists, even if they once allowed themselves to be seduced by the simplicity of this theory, they have for a long time now felt the need to temper the rigour of their primitive orthodoxy and to open their minds to more generous sentiments. M. de Molinari is almost alone, in France, in remaining intractable and I am not aware that he has exercised a great influence on the ideas of our time. In truth, if individualism had no other representatives, it would be quite pointless to move heaven and earth in this way to combat an enemy that is in the process of quietly dying a natural death.

However, there exists another individualism over which it is less easy to triumph. It has been upheld for a century by the great majority of thinkers: it is the individualism of Kant and Rousseau, that of the *spiritualistes*, that

which the Declaration of the Rights of Man sought, more or less successfully, to translate into formulae, that which is currently taught in our schools and which has become the basis of our moral catechism. It is true that it has been thought possible to attack this individualism under cover of the first type, but that differs from it fundamentally and the criticisms which apply to the one could not be appropriate to the other. So far is it from making personal interest the object of human conduct, that it sees in all personal motives the very source of evil. According to Kant, I am only certain of acting well if the motives that influence me relate, not to the particular circumstances in which I am placed, but to my quality as a man *in abstracto*. Conversely, my action is wicked when it cannot be justified logically except by reference to the situation I happen to be in and my social condition, my class or caste interests, my passions, etc. That is why immoral conduct is to be recognised by the sign that it is closely linked to the individuality of the agent and cannot be universalized without manifest absurdity. Similarly, if, according to Rousseau, the general will, which is the basis of the social contract, is infallible, if it is the authentic expression of perfect justice, this is because it is a resultant of all the particular wills; consequently it constitutes a kind of impersonal average from which all individual considerations have been eliminated, since, being divergent and even antagonistic to one another, they are neutralised and cancel each other out.[1] Thus, for both these thinkers, the only ways of acting that are moral are those which are fitting for all men equally, that is to say, which are implied in the notion of man in general.

This is far indeed from that apotheosis of comfort and private interest, that egoistic cult of the self for which utilitarian individualism has justly been reproached. Quite the contrary: according to these moralists, duty consists in averting our attention from what concerns us personally, from all that relates to our empirical individuality, so as uniquely to seek that which our human condition demands, that which we hold in common with all our fellow men. This ideal goes so far beyond the limit of utilitarian ends that it appears to those who aspire to it as marked with a religious character. The human person, whose definition serves as the touchstone according to which good must be distinguished from evil, is considered as sacred, in what one might call the ritual sense of the word. It has something of that transcendental majesty which the churches of all times have given to their Gods. It is conceived as being invested with that mysterious property which creates an empty space around holy objects, which keeps them away from profane contacts and which draws them away from ordinary life. And it is exactly this feature which induces the respect of which it is the object. Whoever makes an attempt on a man's life, on a man's liberty, on a man's honour inspires us with a feeling of horror, in every way analogous to that which the

[1] See *Contrat social*, l. II, Chap. III.

believer experiences when he sees his idol profaned. Such a morality is therefore not simply a hygienic discipline or a wise principle of economy. It is a religion of which man is, at the same time, both believer and God.

But this religion is individualistic, since it has man as its object, and since man is, by definition, an individual. Indeed there is no system whose individualism is more uncompromising. Nowhere are the rights of man affirmed more energetically, since the individual is here placed on the level of sacrosanct objects; nowhere is he more jealously protected from external encroachments, whatever their source. The doctrine of utility can easily accept all kinds of compromises, without denying its fundamental axiom; it can allow that individual liberties should be suspended whenever the interest of the greatest number demands this sacrifice. But there is no possible compromise with a principle which is thus put above and beyond all temporal interests. There is no reason of State which can excuse an outrage against the person when the rights of the person are placed above the State. If, therefore, individualism by itself is a ferment of moral dissolution, one can expect to see its anti-social essence as lying here.

One can now see how grave this question is. For the liberalism of the eighteenth century which is, after all, what is basically at issue, is not simply an armchair theory, a philosophical construction. It has entered into the facts, it has penetrated our institutions and our customs, it has become part of our whole life, and, if we really must rid ourselves of it, it is our entire moral organization that must be rebuilt at the same time.

II

Now, it is a remarkable fact that all these theorists of individualism are no less sensitive to the rights of the collectivity than they are to those of the individual. No one has insisted more emphatically than Kant on the supra-individual character of morality and law. He sees them rather as a set of imperatives that men must obey because they are obligatory, without having to discuss them; and if he has sometimes been reproached for having carried the autonomy of reason to excess, it could equally be said, with some truth, that he based his ethics on an act of unreasoning faith and submission. Besides, doctrines are judged above all by their products, that is to say by the spirit of the doctrines that they engender. Now Kantianism led to the ethics of Fichte, which was already thoroughly imbued with socialism, and to the philosophy of Hegel whose disciple was Marx. As for Rousseau, one knows how his individualism is complemented by an authoritarian conception of society. Following him, the men of the Revolution, in promulgating the famous Declaration of Rights, made France one, indivisible, centralized, and perhaps one should even see the revolutionary achievement as being above all a great movement of national concentration. Finally, the chief reason for

which the *spiritualistes* have always fought against utilitarian morality is that it seemed to them to be incompatible with social necessities.

Perhaps it will be said that this eclecticism is self-contradictory? Certainly, we do not propose to defend the way in which these different thinkers have set about combining these two aspects in the construction of their systems. If, with Rousseau, one begins by seeing the individual as a sort of absolute who can and must be sufficient unto himself, it is obviously difficult then to explain how civil society could be established. But here it is a question of ascertaining, not whether such and such a moralist has succeeded in showing how these two tendencies may be reconciled, but rather whether they are in principle reconcilable or not. The reasons that have been given for establishing their complementarity may be worthless, and yet that complementarity may be real. The very fact that they are generally to be found together in the same thinkers offers at least a presumption that they are contemporaneous with one another; whence it follows that they must depend on a single social condition of which they are probably only different aspects.

And, in effect, once one has ceased to confuse individualism with its opposite, that is to say, with utilitarianism, all these apparent contradictions vanish as if by magic. This religion of humanity has all that is required to speak to its believers in a tone that is no less imperative than the religions it replaces. Far from confining itself to indulging our instincts, it offers us an ideal which infinitely surpasses nature; for we do not naturally have that wise and pure reason which, dissociated from all personal motives, would make laws in the abstract concerning its own conduct. Doubtless, if the dignity of the individual derived from his individual qualities, from those particular characteristics which distinguish him from others, one might fear that he would become enclosed in a sort of moral egoism that would render all social cohesion impossible. But in reality he receives this dignity from a higher source, one which he shares with all men. If he has the right to this religious respect, it is because he has in him something of humanity. It is humanity that is sacred and worthy of respect. And this is not his exclusive possession. It is distributed among all his fellows, and in consequence he cannot take it as a goal for his conduct without being obliged to go beyond himself and turn towards others. The cult of which he is at once both object and follower does not address itself to the particular being that constitutes himself and carries his name, but to the human person, wherever it is to be found, and in whatever form it is incarnated. Impersonal and anonymous, such an end soars far above all particular consciences and can thus serve as a rallying-point for them. The fact that it is not remote from us (for the very reason that it is human) does not prevent it from dominating us.

Now all that societies require in order to hold together is that their members fix their eyes on the same end and come together in a single faith; but it

is not at all necessary that the object of this common faith be quite unconnected with individual persons. In short, individualism thus understood is the glorification not of the self, but of the individual in general. Its motive force is not egoism but sympathy for all that is human, a wider pity for all sufferings, for all human miseries, a more ardent desire to combat and alleviate them, a greater thirst for justice. Is this not the way to achieve a community of all men of good will? Doubtless it can happen that individualism is practised in quite a different spirit. Certain people use it for their own personal ends, as a means for disguising their egoism and escaping more easily from their duties towards society. But this deceptive misuse of individualism proves nothing against it, just as the utilitarian fictions of religious hypocrites prove nothing against religion.

But I now immediately come to the great objection. This cult of man has for its first dogma the autonomy of reason and for its first rite freedom of thought. Now, it will be said, if all opinions are free, by what miracle will they then be harmonious? If they are formed without knowledge of one another and without having to take account of one another, how can they fail to be incoherent? Intellectual and moral anarchy would then be the inevitable consequence of liberalism. Such is the argument, always being refuted and always reappearing, which the perennial adversaries of reason take up periodically, with a perseverance that nothing can discourage, each time a passing weariness of the human spirit puts it more at their mercy. Certainly, it is true that individualism does not go without a certain intellectualism; for liberty of thought is the first of all liberties. But why has it been seen to have as a consequence this absurd self-infatuation which would confine each within his own desires and would create a gap between men's minds? What it demands is the right for each individual to know those things that he may legitimately know. It does not sanction unlimited right to incompetence. Concerning a question on which I cannot pronounce with expert knowledge, my intellectual independence suffers no loss if I follow a more competent opinion. The collaboration of scientists is only possible thanks to this mutual deference. Each science continuously borrows from its neighbours propositions which it accepts without verifying them. The only thing is that my intellect requires reasons for bowing to the authority of others. Respect for authority is in no way incompatible with rationalism provided that authority be rationally based.

This is why, when one seeks to summon certain men to rally to a sentiment that they do not share, it is not sufficient, in order to convince them, to remind them of that commonplace of banal rhetoric, that society is not possible without mutual sacrifices and without a certain spirit of subordination. It is still necessary to justify *in this particular case* the submission one asks of them, by showing them their incompetence. When, on the other

hand, it is a matter of one of those questions which pertain, by definition, to the common judgement of men, such an abdication is contrary to all reason and, in consequence, contrary to duty. For, in order to know whether a court of justice can be allowed to condemn an accused man without having heard his defence, there is no need for any special expertise. It is a problem of practical morality concerning which every man of good sense is competent and about which no one ought to be indifferent. If, therefore, in these recent times, a certain number of artists, but above all of scholars, have believed that they ought to refuse to assent to a judgement whose legality appeared to them to be suspect, it is not because, as chemists or philologists, philosophers or historians, they attribute to themselves any special privileges, or any exclusive right of exercising control over the case in question. It is rather that, being men, they seek to exercise their entire right as men and to keep before them a matter which concerns reason alone. It is true that they have shown themselves more jealous of this right than the rest of society; but that is simply because, as a result of their professional activities, they have it nearer to heart. Accustomed by the practice of scientific method to reserve judgement when they are not fully aware of the facts, it is natural that they give in less readily to the enthusiasms of the crowd and to the prestige of authority.

III

Not only is individualism distinct from anarchy; but it is henceforth the only system of beliefs which can ensure the moral unity of the country.

One often hears it said today that only a religion can bring about this harmony. This proposition, which modern prophets feel it necessary to utter in a mystical tone of voice, is really no more than a simple truism over which everyone can agree. For we know today that a religion does not necessarily imply symbols and rites in the full sense, or temples and priests. All this external apparatus is merely its superficial aspect. Essentially, it is nothing other than a system of collective beliefs and practices that have a special authority. Once a goal is pursued by a whole people, it acquires, as a result of this unanimous adherence, a sort of moral supremacy which raises it far above private goals and thereby gives it a religious character. On the other hand, it is clear that a society cannot hold together unless there exists among its members a certain intellectual and moral community. However, having recalled this sociological truism, one has not advanced very far. For if it is true that religion is, in a sense, indispensable, it is no less certain that religions change, that yesterday's religion could not be that of tomorrow. Thus, what we need to know is what the religion of today should be.

Now, all the evidence points to the conclusion that the only possible candidate is precisely this religion of humanity whose rational expression is the individualist morality. To what, after all, should collective sentiments be

directed in future? As societies become more voluminous and spread over vaster territories, their traditions and practices, in order to adapt to the diversity of situations and constantly changing circumstances, are compelled to maintain a state of plasticity and instability which no longer offers adequate resistance to individual variations. These latter, being less well contained, develop more freely and multiply in number; that is, everyone increasingly follows his own path. At the same time, as a consequence of a more advanced division of labour, each mind finds itself directed towards a different point of the horizon, reflects a different aspect of the world and, as a result, the contents of men's minds differ from one subject to another. One is thus gradually proceeding towards a state of affairs, now almost attained, in which the members of a single social group will no longer have anything in common other than their humanity, that is, the characteristics which constitute the human person in general. This idea of the human person, given different emphases in accordance with the diversity of national temperaments, is therefore the sole idea that survives, immutable and impersonal, above the changing tides of particular opinions; and the sentiments which it awakens are the only ones to be found in almost all hearts. The communion of minds can no longer form around particular rites and prejudices, since rites and prejudices have been swept away in the natural course of things. In consequence, there remains nothing that men may love and honour in common, apart from man himself. This is why man has become a god for man, and it is why he can no longer turn to other gods without being untrue to himself. And just as each of us embodies something of humanity, so each individual mind has within it something of the divine, and thereby finds itself marked by a characteristic which renders it sacred and inviolable to others. The whole of individualism lies here. That is what makes it into the doctrine that is currently necessary. For, should we wish to hold back its progress, we would have to prevent men from becoming increasingly differentiated from one another, reduce their personalities to a single level, bring them back to the old conformism of former times and arrest, in consequence, the tendency of societies to become ever more extended and centralised, and stem the unceasing growth of the division of labour. Such an undertaking, whether desirable or not, infinitely surpasses all human powers.

What, in any case, are we offered in place of this individualism that is so disparaged? The merits of Christian morality are extolled to us and we are subtly invited to rally to its support. But are those who take this position unaware that the originality of Christianity has consisted precisely in a remarkable development of the individualist spirit? While the religion of the Ancient City was entirely made up of material practices from which the spiritual element was absent, Christianity expressed in an inward faith, in the personal conviction of the individual, the essential condition of godliness.

It was the first to teach that the moral value of actions must be measured in accordance with intention, which is essentially private, escapes all external judgements and which only the agent can competently judge. The very centre of the moral life was thus transferred from outside to within and the individual was set up as the sovereign judge of his own conduct having no other accounts to render than those to himself and to his God. Finally, in completing the definitive separation of the spiritual and the temporal, in abandoning the world to the disputes of men, Christ at the same time opened the way for science and freedom of thought. In this way one can explain the rapid progress made by scientific thought from the date that Christian societies were established. Let no one therefore denounce individualism as the enemy that must be opposed at all costs! One only opposes it so as to return to it, so impossible is it to escape. Whatever alternative is offered turns out to be a form of it. The whole question, however, is to know how much of it is appropriate, and whether some advantage is to be gained by disguising it by means of symbols. Now, if individualism is as dangerous as people say, it is hard to see how it could become inoffensive or salutary, by the mere fact of having its true nature hidden with the aid of metaphors. And, on the other hand, if that restricted individualism which constitutes Christianity was necessary eighteen centuries ago, it seems probable that a more developed individualism should be indispensable today; for things have changed in the interval. It is thus a singular error to present individualist morality as antagonistic to Christian morality; quite the contrary, it is derived from it. By adhering to the former, we do not disown our past; we merely continue it.

We are now in a better position to understand the reason why certain people believe that they must offer an unyielding resistance to all that seems to them to threaten the individualist faith. If every attack on the rights of an individual revolts them, this is not solely because of sympathy for the victim. Nor is it because they fear that they themselves will suffer similar acts of injustice. Rather it is that such outrages cannot rest unpunished without putting national existence in jeopardy. It is indeed impossible that they should be freely allowed to occur without weakening the sentiments that they violate; and as these sentiments are all that we still have in common, they cannot be weakened without disturbing the cohesion of society. A religion which tolerates acts of sacrilege abdicates any sway over men's minds. The religion of the individual can therefore allow itself to be flouted without resistance, only on penalty of ruining its credit; since it is the sole link which binds us one to another, such a weakening cannot take place without the onset of social dissolution. Thus the individualist, who defends the rights of the individual, defends at the same time the vital interests of society; for he is preventing the criminal impoverishment of that final reserve of collective ideas and sentiments that constitutes the very soul of the

nation. He renders his country the same service that the ancient Roman rendered his city when he defended traditional rites against reckless innovators. And if there is one country among all others in which the individualist cause is truly national, it is our own; for there is no other whose fate has been so closely bound up with the fate of these ideas. We gave the most recent expression to it, and it is from us that other people have received it. That is why we have hitherto been held to be its most authoritative exponents. We cannot therefore renounce it today, without renouncing ourselves, without diminishing ourselves in the eyes of the world, without committing real moral suicide. Lately it has been asked whether it would not perhaps be convenient for us to agree to a temporary eclipse of these principles, so as not to disturb the functioning of a system of public administration which everyone, anyway, recognizes to be indispensable to the security of the state. We do not know if the antinomy really presents itself in this acute form; but, in any case, if a choice really must be made between these two evils, we would choose the worst of them were we to sacrifice what has hitherto been our historical *raison d'etre*. A public institution, however important it may be, is only an instrument, a means that relates to an end. What is the point of so carefully preserving the means if one abandons the end? And what a deplorable calculation to make—to renounce, in order to live, all that consitutes the worth and dignity of living,

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas!

IV

In truth, it is to be feared that this campaign has been mounted with a certain lack of seriousness. A verbal similarity has made it possible to believe that *individualism* necessarily resulted from *individual*, and thus egoistic, sentiments. In reality, the religion of the individual is a social institution like all known religions. It is society which assigns us this ideal as the sole common end which is today capable of providing a focus for men's wills. To remove this ideal, without putting any other in its place, is therefore to plunge us into that very moral anarchy which it is sought to avoid.[1]

All the same, we should not consider as perfect and definitive the formula with which the eighteenth century gave expression to individualism, a formula which we have made the mistake of preserving in an almost unchanged form. Although it was adequate a century ago, it is now in need of being enlarged and completed. It presented individualism only in its most

[1] This is how it is possible, without contradiction, to be an individualist while asserting that the individual is a product of society, rather than its cause. The reason is that individualism itself is a social product, like all moralities and all religions. The individual receives from society even the moral beliefs which deify him. This is what Kant and Rousseau did not understand. They wished to deduce their individualist ethics not from society, but from the notion of the isolated individual. Such an enterprise was impossible, and from it resulted the logical contradictions of their systems.

negative aspect. Our fathers were concerned exclusively with freeing the individual from the political fetters which hampered his development. Freedom of thought, freedom to write, and freedom to vote were thus placed by them among the primary values that it was necessary to achieve, and this emancipation was certainly the necessary condition for all subsequent progress. However, carried away by the enthusiasm of the struggle, solely concerned with the objective they pursued, they ended by no longer seeing beyond it, and by converting into a sort of ultimate goal what was merely the next stage in their efforts. Now, political liberty is a means, not an end. It is worth no more than the manner in which it is put to use. If it does not serve something which exists beyond it, it is not merely useless: it becomes dangerous. If those who handle this weapon do not know how to use it in fruitful battles, they will not be slow in turning it against themselves.

It is precisely for this reason that it has fallen today into a certain discredit. The men of my generation recall how great was our enthusiasm when, twenty years ago, we finally succeeded in toppling the last barriers which we impatiently confronted. But alas! disenchantment came quickly; for we soon had to admit that no one knew what to do with this liberty that had been so laboriously achieved. Those to whom we owed it only made use of it in internecine strife. And it was from that moment that one felt the growth in the country of this current of gloom and despondency, which became stronger with each day that passed, the ultimate result of which must inevitably be to break the spirit of those least able to resist.

Thus, we can no longer subscribe to this negative ideal. It is necessary to go beyond what has been achieved, if only to preserve it. Indeed, if we do not learn to put to use the means of action that we have in our hands, it is inevitable that they will become less effective. Let us therefore use our liberties in order to discover what must be done and with the aim of doing it. Let us use them in order to alleviate the functioning of the social machine, still so harsh to individuals, in order to put at their disposal all possible means for developing their faculties unhindered, in order, finally, to work towards making a reality of the famous precept: to each according to his works! Let us recognize that, in general, liberty is a delicate instrument the use of which must be learnt, and let us teach this to our children; all moral education should be directed to this end. One can see that we will not be short of things to do. However, if it is certain that we will henceforth have to work out new objectives, beyond those which have been attained, it would be senseless to renounce the latter so as to pursue the former more easily; for necessary advances are only possible thanks to those already achieved. It is a matter of completing, extending, and organizing individualism, not of restricting it or struggling against it. It is a matter of using and not stifling rational faculties. They alone can help us emerge from our present difficulties; we do not see

what else can do so. In any case, it is not by meditating on the *Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte* that we will ever find the means of organizing economic life and introducing more justice into contractual relations!

In these circumstances, does not our duty appear to be clearly marked out? All those who believe in the value, or even merely in the necessity, of the moral revolution accomplished a century ago, have the same interest: they must forget the differences which divide them and combine their efforts so as to hold positions already won. Once this crisis is surmounted, it will certainly be appropriate to recall the lessons of experience, so that we may avoid falling once more into that sterile inaction for which we are now paying; but that is the task of tomorrow. As for today, the urgent task, which must be put before all else, is that of saving our moral patrimony; once that is secure, we shall see that it is made to prosper. May the common danger we confront at least help us by shaking us out of our torpor and giving us again the taste for action! And already, indeed, one sees initiatives awakening within the country, men of good will seeking one another out. Let someone appear who can combine them and lead them into the struggle: perhaps victory will then not be long in coming. For what should, to a certain extent, reassure us is that our adversaries are only strong by virtue of our weakness. They have neither that deep faith nor those generous enthusiasms which sweep people irresistibly to great reactions as well as to great revolutions. Of course, we would not dream of doubting their sincerity; yet who can fail to notice the improvised quality of all that they believe? They are neither apostles who allow themselves to be overwhelmed by their anger or their enthusiasm, nor are they scholars who bring us the product of their research and their deliberations. They are literary men seduced by an interesting theme. It seems therefore impossible that these games of dilettantes should succeed in keeping hold for long of the masses, providing that we know how to act. Moreover, what a humiliation it would be if, having no stronger opponents than these, reason were to end by being defeated, even if only for a time!