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## The End of Reason

By Max Horkheimer

The fundamental concepts of civilization are in a process of rapid decay. The rising generation no longer feels any confidence in them, and Fascism has strengthened their suspicions. The question of how far these concepts are at all valid clamors more than ever for answer. The decisive concept among them was that of reason, and philosophy knew of no higher principle. It was supposed to order the relationships among men and to justify all the performances demanded of them. The church fathers and the guiding spirits of the Enlightenment agreed in their praise of reason. Voltaire called it "God's incomprehensible gift to mankind" and "the source of every society, institution, and order."<sup>1</sup> Origen said we should not compare men, even bad men, to animals, in order that we might not dishonor reason.<sup>2</sup> To the ancient world reason was the masterful principle of creation,<sup>3</sup> to Kant, its triumph was the hidden yet certain trend of world history notwithstanding all retrogression, interludes of darkness, deviations.<sup>4</sup> It is from this ideal of reason that the ideas of freedom, justice, and truth derived their justification. They were held to be innate to it, intuited or necessarily conceived by it. The era of reason is the title of honor claimed by the enlightened world.

The philosophy this world produced is essentially rationalistic, but time and again in following out its own principles it turns against itself and takes the form of skepticism. The dogmatic or the skeptical nuance, depending on which was given the emphasis, in each case determined the relation of philosophy to social forces, and in the shifting fortunes of the ensuing struggle the changing significance of rationality itself became manifest. The concept of reason from the very beginning included the concept of critique. Rationalism itself had established the criteria of rigidity, clarity and distinctness as the criteria of rational cognition. Skeptical and empiri-

<sup>1</sup>*Dialogue d'Ephémère, Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1880, Garnier, Vol. 30, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Origen against Celsus*, Book 4, ch. 25 (The Antinicean Fathers, ed. Robert and Donaldson, New York 1890, Vol. IV, p. 507).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I 1260a 18.

<sup>4</sup>Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, Ninth Proposition.

cal doctrines opposed rationalism with these selfsame standards. The left wing Socratic opposition branded Plato's academy a breeding place of superstition, until the latter moved toward skepticism. Siger of Brabant and Roger Bacon fought the scholastic rationalism of Thomas Aquinas until his own order, after Duns Scotus, gave way to more empirical tendencies. Progressive and reactionary thinkers alike, the materialistic physicians and Gassendi; the Jesuit, protested against Descartes' doctrine of the spiritual nature of man. Kant was told even in Germany that his philosophy boasted without justification of its victory over Hume's skepticism.<sup>1</sup>

Skepticism purged the idea of reason of so much of its content that today scarcely anything is left of it. Reason, in destroying conceptual fetishes, ultimately destroyed itself. Formerly it was the herald of eternal ideas, which were only dimly shadowed in the material world. Later, it was supposed to recognize itself in the order of natural things and to discover the immutable forms of reality in which eternal reason was expressed. Throughout the millennia philosophers believed that they possessed such knowledge. Now they have learned better. None of the categories of rationalism has survived. Modern science looks upon such of them as Mind, Will, Final Cause, Transcendental Creation, Innate Ideas, *res extensa* and *res cogitans* as spooks, despising them even more than Galileo did the cobwebs of scholasticism. Reason itself appears as a ghost that has emerged from linguistic usage. According to most recent logics, the grammar of every day language is still adapted to an animistic pattern of thought, continuously hypostatizing states and actions as nominatives, so that within this language "life calls," "duty demands," and "the nothing threatens." By this method reason comes to "make discoveries" and to "exist as one and the same in all men." The name of such reason is held to be a meaningless symbol, an allegorical figure without a function, and all ideas that transcend the given reality are forced to share its disgrace. Since this opinion has pervaded every stratum of our society it does not suffice to propagate freedom, the dignity of man, or even truth. Any attempts along this line only raise the suspicion that the true reasons behind them are either held back or are entirely lacking.

Nevertheless, reason has not been cancelled altogether from the vocabulary of those who are up to date, but has only been reduced

<sup>1</sup>Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie. Nebst einer Verteidigung des Skeptizismus gegen die Anmassung der Vernunftkritik*. 1792. In Neudrucke der Kantgesellschaft, Berlin 1911, p. 135.

to its pragmatic significance much more radically than ever before. Gone are the teachings of rationalistic metaphysics, but the patterns of rationalistic behavior have remained. Locke once wrote, "the word reason in the English language has different significations; sometimes it is taken for true and clear principles; sometimes for clear and fair deductions from those principles; and sometimes for the cause, and particularly the final cause."<sup>1</sup> He appended four degrees of reason: discovering truths, regularly and methodically ordering them, perceiving their connections, and drawing the right conclusion. Apart from the final cause, these functions today still are held to be rational. Reason in this sense is as indispensable in the modern technique of war as it has always been in the conduct of business. Its features can be summarized as the optimum adaptation of means to ends, thinking as an energy-conserving operation. It is a pragmatic instrument oriented to expediency, cold and sober. The belief in cleverness rests on motives much more cogent than metaphysical propositions. When even the dictators of today appeal to reason they mean that they possess the most tanks. They were rational enough to build them; others should be rational enough to yield to them. Within the range of Fascism, to defy such reason is the cardinal crime.

As close as the bond between reason and efficiency is here revealed to be, in reality so has it always been. The causes of this interconnection lie within the basic structure of society itself. The human being can fulfill his natural wants only through social channels. Use is a social category, and reason follows it up in all phases of competitive society; through reason the individual asserts or adapts himself and gets along in society. It induces the individual to subordinate himself to society whenever he is not powerful enough to pattern society upon his own interests. Among primitives the individual's place in society was determined by instinct, in modern society it is supposed to be determined by reason, that is to say, by the individual's consciousness of where his advantage lies. Even Greek idealism was to a large extent pragmatic in this sense and identified the good and the advantageous, the beautiful and the useful,<sup>2</sup> putting the welfare of the whole before the welfare of its members. The individual was nothing apart from that whole. The entire humanistic tradition of philosophy tried to bring the two together. Reason, in humanism, aimed at the proper balance between what is good for the individual and what is good for the totality.

<sup>1</sup>*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, ch. xvii, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. E. Zeller, *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, transl. by Reichel, London 1868, p. 125.

The *Polis* was guided by the ideal of harmony between the individual interest and the common good. The medieval towns and the political theorists of the rising national state renewed this ideal. Harmony was supposed to come about through the sphere of law. Whoever desires to live among men has to obey their laws—this is what the secular morality of Western civilization comes down to. Montaigne says in discussing Socrates that as long as we seek refuge in religion we have one guide only, that each must obey the laws of his country.<sup>1</sup> Rationality in the form of such obedience swallows up everything, even the freedom to think. This is the one point on which De Maistre agrees with the French revolution. "Government is a veritable religion: it has its dogmas, its mysteries, its ministers . . . the primary need of man is that his growing reason . . . be lost in the national reason so that it may change his individual existence into another, common, existence, just as a river that flows into the ocean always exists in the mass of water though without a name and without a distinct reality. What is *patriotism*? It is that national reason of which I speak; it is the *abnegation* of the individual."<sup>2</sup> This brand of reason also prevailed in the cults of the French revolution. Mathiez, the apologist for Robespierre, says that the religion of reason had as much intolerance in it as did the old religion. ". . . It admits of no contradiction, it requires oaths, it is made obligatory by prison, exile or the scaffold, and like religion proper it is concretized in sacred signs, in definite and exclusive symbols which are surrounded by a suspicious piety."<sup>3</sup>

The basic unity of the period obliterates differences of opinion. The enthusiasm of the counter-revolution and of the popular leaders not only joined in a common faith in the executioner but also in the conviction that reason may at any time justify renouncing thought, particularly of the poor. De Maistre, a belated absolutist, preaches forswearing reason for reason's sake. The others set up the *Comité du Salut Publique*.

The individual has to do violence to himself and learn that the life of the whole is the necessary precondition of his own. Reason has to master rebellious feelings and instincts, the inhibition of which is supposed to make human cooperation possible. Inhibitions originally imposed from without have to become part and parcel of the individual's own consciousness,—this principle already prevailed

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Les Essais*, edited Villey, Paris 1930, Vol. II, ch. xii, p. 491 ff.

<sup>2</sup>De Maistre, *Étude sur la Souveraineté*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Lyon 1891, Tome I, pp. 367-77.

<sup>3</sup>A. Mathiez, *Contributions à l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution Française*, Paris 1907, p. 32.

Happiness  
For  
most

→

Glory  
for  
most of  
true  
citizens

(can't really  
compare  
with  
enlightenment)

most ind.s → defined mass famo friends, lovers

in the ancient world. What is called progress lay in the social expansion of it. In the Christian era everyone was to bear the cross voluntarily. For those at the base of the social pyramid, however, the harmony between the universal and the particular interest was merely a postulate. They had no share in that common interest which they were asked to make their own. It was never quite rational to them to renounce their instincts, and as a result they never were quite reached by civilization, but were always made sociable by force. This is what dictatorship always has been based upon. The *beati possidentes*, however, rightly regarded the political and spiritual powers as agencies of their own. They fulfilled for themselves the idea of a rational civilization in so far as their sociability was derived from their knowledge of their individual interests. The latter remain the rational criteria for the harmony between the universal and the particular interest.

The difficulties of rationalistic philosophy originate from the fact that the universality of reason cannot be anything else than the accord among the interests of all individuals alike, whereas in reality society has been split up into groups with conflicting interests. Owing to this contradiction the appeal to the universality of reason assumes the features of the spurious and the illusory. Reason's claim to be absolute presupposes that a true community exists among men. By denying the reality of universal concepts and pointing to existing reality instead, the empiricists are right as against the rationalists. On the other hand, the rationalists are right as against the empiricists in that, through what is implied in their concept of reason, they uphold the potential solidarity of men as an ideal against the actual state of affairs in which solidarity is asserted with violence and catastrophe. At the close of the liberal era, however, thinking in terms of mere existence, of sober self-preservation, has spread over the whole of society. All men have become empiricists.

The definition of reason in terms of individual self-preservation apparently contradicts Locke's prototypical definition, according to which reason designates the direction of intellectual activity regardless of its external goal. But Locke's definition still holds true. It does not liberate reason from the atomic self-interest of the individual. It rather defines procedures which more readily suit whatever goal self-interest may require. The increasingly formalistic universality of reason, far from signifying an increasing consciousness of universal solidarity, expresses the skeptical separation of thought from its object. Thought becomes what it was designated to

be during the Aristotelian beginnings of empirical science, namely, an "organon." As a consequence of Locke and Kant, thought no longer conceives the objects as they really are, but contents itself with ordering and classifying supposedly pure data. The triumph of nominalism goes hand in hand with the triumph of formalism. In limiting itself to seeing objects as a strange multiplicity, as a chaos, reason becomes a kind of adding machine that manipulates analytical judgments. The objects could be regarded as an unqualified mass in philosophy because economic reality had levelled them, rendering all things equivalent to money as the common denominator. In the face of such levelling the proper being of the object is no longer taken into account. Cognition thus becomes that which registers the objects and proceeds to interpret the quantified expressions of them. The less human beings think of reality in qualitative terms, the more susceptible reality becomes to manipulation. Its objects are neither understood nor respected.

The sheer multiplicity of objects has its counterpart in the so-called pluralism of ends, according to which a gulf exists between the scientific judgments and the realm of values. As a result the value judgment has nothing to do with reason and science. It is regarded as a matter of subjective preference whether one decides for liberty or obedience, democracy or Fascism, enlightenment or authority, mass culture or truth. Freedom of choice, however, has always been the privilege of the small groups which enjoyed a life of abundance. For them it was possible to select among the so-called cultural goods, always provided that these goods were in harmony with their interests of dominion. This was the only pluralism of values that materialized. Wherever the values in question affected the base of European society, they were predetermined. The will to self-preservation of the upper strata of society, though it was rent asunder by competition, unequivocally defined the course of action against slaves, serfs, and masses. The perpetuation of privileges was the only rational criterion which determined whether one should fight against or collude with other interests and groups, maintain constitutional government or take the step to authoritarianism. The great historic decisions differed from one another in being far-sighted or near-sighted, not in the nature of their ends.

Self-preservation was also at the root of the variety of attributes characterizing individuality. Poise, rank, propriety, gallantry, still are what pragmatism mistakes them to be, habitual forms of the individual's adjustment to the social situation. In the distant past all who behaved at variance with these norms were threatened with loss



of class standing. Today, the norms are remnants of those past forms of society in which the individual was lost without them. They still retain the mark of these times, but with the loss of their purpose they have lost their vigor. As the ornaments on useful objects point to past techniques of production, the imperfection of which they retain as adornments, so the now impotent human standards of behavior inherited from feudal ages still bear the hallmark of the violence which the lords of the past had to exercise against themselves for the sake of their own adjustment. In the present state of society these human traits assume the reconciliatory character of the purposeless, but they still adapt themselves very well to prevailing ends. The aristocrat, who left the domestic market to the business man, attempted instead to conquer the foreign market for him. Aristocrats held their monopoly as war lords for the business man until the new technology of war brought about the inevitable alteration. They held it even at a time when bourgeois norms, attitudes, and reactions, such as thrift and integrity, already began to share the fate of aristocratic standards of behavior. The latter owed their glory chiefly to the efforts of the middle class to strengthen its position by glorifying its predecessors. This solidarity with past rulers is derived from a common attitude to the rest of society. Power is made to appear as eternal. One's own prestige is enhanced if functionaries of the middle class like Napoleon Bonaparte find their place in the pantheon of history side by side with other great lords and executioners regardless of whether they were friends or enemies. At home, the well-to-do imitate what they call style; in their offices they abide by the standards of business morality, since their class cannot exist without a discipline of its own; as against internal and external competitors and as against the masses, however, they practice that which actually links them to the historical tradition, namely, integral self-preservation.

This self-preservation may even call for the death of the individual which is to be preserved. Sacrifice can be rational when it becomes necessary to defend the state's power which is alone capable of guaranteeing the existence of those whose sacrifice it demands. The idea of reason, even in its nominalistic and purified form, has always justified sacrifice. During the heroic era the individual destroyed his life for the interests and symbols of the collectivity that guaranteed it. Property was the institution that conveyed to the individual the idea that something of his existence might remain after death. At the origin of organized society, property endured while generations passed away. The monadic individual survived

by bequeathing it. Through the legacy, the individual perpetuated himself even after his death, but he did not contradict the principle of self-preservation if he sacrificed his life to the state whose laws guaranteed this legacy. Sacrifice thus took its place as a rational institution.

The rationality of sacrifice and self-renunciation, however, was differentiated according to social status: it decreased with decreasing wealth and opportunity, and eventually became compulsory. As against the poor it has always been rational to supplement reason with earthly and heavenly justice. Voltaire admits that reason might triumph for decent people, "but the *canaille* is not made for it."<sup>1</sup> "We have never intended to enlighten shoemakers and servants,— this is up to apostles,"<sup>2</sup> he says.

For the masses the road from one's own interest to that of preserving society was devious and long. In their case one could not rely upon rational and self-imposed renunciation of instincts or drives. If a Greek slave or a woman had spoken and acted like Socrates she would have been a fool, not a sage. Socrates, by his death, elevated loyalty to the laws of the state above all else. Within the era of conscience that he initiated rationality pertained to those who were socially more or less independent.

The masses turned to religion, but their doing so did not affect the basic rationality of self-preservation. Rationalism has no right to complain about Luther. The latter called reason a beast and a whore only because at his time reason could not of itself cause the individual to suppress his appetites. The religious Reformation trained men to subordinate their lives to more remote ends. Instead of surrendering to the moment they were taught to learn objective reasoning, consistency, and pragmatic behavior. Man was thus not only strengthened in his resistance to fate but was also enabled to free himself now and then from the overpowering mechanism of self-preservation and expediency. Such contemplative pauses, however, could not prevent the interest of the prevailing order from spreading its roots in the hearts of men. Protestantism promoted the spread of that cold rationality which is so characteristic of the modern individual. It was iconoclastic and did away with the false worship of things, but by allying itself with the rising economic system it made men dependent upon the world of things even to a higher degree than

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to D'Alembert, Feb. 4, 1757, *op. cit.*, Vol. 39, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to D'Alembert, Sept. 2, 1768, *op. cit.*, Vol. 46, p. 112.

before. Where formerly they worked for the sake of salvation, they were now induced to work for work's sake, profit for profit's sake, power for power's sake. The whole world was transformed into a mere "material." If the new spirit served as an anodyne for the people it was at least one that eased the surgery, foreordained by rationalism, which the industrial system worked on their bodies and minds. There was no other path from the medieval workshop to the assembly line than through the inversion of external compulsion into the compulsion of conscience. It produced the machine-like assiduity and pliable allegiance required by the new rationality. Calvin's theocratic irrationalism eventually revealed itself as the cunning of technocratic reason which had to shape its human material. Misery and the poor laws did not suffice to drive men into the workshops of the early capitalistic era. The new spirit helped to supplement the external pressures with a concern for wife and child to which the moral autonomy of the introverted subject in reality was tantamount. Today, at the end of this process which originated in Renaissance and Reformation, the rational form of self-preservation boils down to an obstinate compliance as such which has, however, become indifferent to any political or religious content. In Fascism, the autonomy of the individual has developed into heteronomy.

√ The totalitarian order marks the leap from the indirect to direct forms of domination, while still maintaining a system of private enterprise. The National Socialists do not stand outside the pattern of economic trends. The gangster theory of National Socialism must be taken even more seriously than it is by those who believe that a normal state of affairs could be restored as soon as the fester has been removed. Government in Germany was not usurped by gangsters who forced an entry from without; rather, social domination led to gangster rule by virtue of its own economic principle. During the era of free industrial economy when none of the many decentralized enterprises was so powerful that it did not need to compact with the others, self-preservation was restricted by standards of *humanitas*. Monopolism has again abolished these restrictions and led social domination back to its true nature which had continued to operate only where the humane form of domination had left some loopholes to inhumanity, in the petty rackets and rings of the big cities. They knew of no other law than the discipline they inevitably had to have in order to plunder their clients. Procurers, condottieri, manorial lords and guilds have always protected and at the same time exploited their clients. Protection is the archetype of domination. After the interlude of liberalism economic tendencies in Europe progressed toward a new and total protectionism. Only the great com-

business survived competition. They were strong enough to destroy the separation of powers and the network of guarantees and rights. The monopolies and their government constituted an impenetrable jungle for the masses. The magnitude and diversity of the tasks of the prevailing cliques, the all-embracing character of which still distinguishes them from racketeering, turns into comprehensive planning on the one hand and on the other into an attack on mankind as such. This is the inevitable result of the economic development itself. The same sociological mechanisms apply to the monopoly and to the city racket. The latter had previously shared the spoils with other rackets of the same branch, but the growth of communication and the progressing centralization of the police made it impossible to continue with small bribes and the procurement of new henchmen and guns. The racket was forced to mechanize its business and to undertake the costly task of affiliating it to large political organizations. Such investments are profitable only if the spoils do not have to be divided. In the racket, cartelization asserts itself. The rackets in the cities and in the entire country are driven to unification unless the police succeed in eradicating them in time. A study of such border phenomena as racketeering may offer useful parallels for understanding certain developmental tendencies in modern society. As soon as the concentrated power of large property has reached a certain point, the struggle continues on a broader scale and develops, under the pressure of giant investments necessitated by the progress of technology, into the struggle for world conquest interrupted only by periods of precarious compromise. From this point on, the differences of goals and ideals within the power hierarchy recede before the differences in the degree of docility. The *élites* must see to it, even against their own will, that in the social order everything is rigidly coordinated. Under totalitarian conditions of society, reliability decides upon the allocation of all positions of trust, whether a manager of a provincial factory is to be appointed or the head of a puppet government. Side by side with efficiency, human qualities of a kind again win respect, particularly a resolution to go along with the powerful at any cost. For the trustees are mere delegates. He who is worthy of his task is not to show any traces of that which the self-criticism of reason has destroyed. He must embody the self-preservation of a whole that has become identical with the liquidation of humanity. At the beginning of the history of modern rackets stand the Inquisitioners, at its end the Fascist leaders. Their henchmen, living their lives face to face with catastrophe, have to react correctly until they fall victim to the rational principle that none may abide too long.

Present day contempt of reason does not extend to purposive behavior. The term mind, insofar as it designates an intellectual faculty or an objective principle, appears as a meaningless word unless it refers to a coordination of ends and means. The destruction of rationalistic dogmatism through the self-criticism of reason, carried out by the ever renewed nominalistic tendencies in philosophy, has now been ratified by historical reality. The substance of individuality itself, to which the idea of autonomy was bound, did not survive the process of industrialization. Reason has degenerated because it was the ideological projection of a false universality which now shows the autonomy of the subject to have been an illusion. The collapse of reason and the collapse of individuality are one and the same. "The ego is unsavable,"<sup>1</sup> and self-preservation has lost its "self." For whom can an action still be useful if the biological individual is no longer conscious of itself as an identical unit? Throughout its various stages of life the body possesses only a questionable identity. The unity of individual life has been a social rather than natural one. When the social mechanisms which made for this unity are weakened as they are today, the individual's concern for his self-preservation changes its meaning. What previously served to promote man's development, the joy in knowledge, living through memory and foresight, pleasure in oneself and others, narcissism as well as love, are losing their content. Neither conscience nor egoism is left. The moral law has become inadequate for those who are supposed to obey it, and the authority which it previously invoked has disappeared. Morality had to disappear, since it did not conform with its own principle. It pretended to be independent of empirical individuals, unconditionally universal. But its universal form perpetuated antagonisms among individuals and a tyranny over men and nature. It is vain to hope that in better times men will return to morality. Yet even in Fascism it has left its traces within men, and these at least have been freed of spurious positivity. Morality has survived insofar as men are conscious that the reality to which they yield is not the right one. Nietzsche proclaimed the death of morality; modern psychology has devoted itself to exploring it. Psychoanalysis as the adjustment form of modern skepticism triumphed over moral law through its discovery and unmasking of the father in the super-ego. This psychology, however, was the "owl of Minerva" which took its flight when the shades of dark were already gathering over the whole sphere of private life. The father may still possess a super-ego, but the child has long unmasked it, together

<sup>1</sup>Ernst Mach, *Contributions to the Analysis of the Sensations*, transl. by C. M. Williams, Chicago 1897, p. 20.

with the ego and the character. Today the child imitates only performances and achievements; he accepts not ideas, but matters of fact.

With the disappearance of independent economic subjects, the subject as such disappears. It is no longer a synthetic unit; it has become senseless for it to preserve itself for some distant future or to plan for its heirs. In the present period the individual has opportunities only on short term. Once secure property has vanished as the goal of acquisition, the intrinsic connection between the experiences of the individual disappears. Concern for property under orderly competition and the rule of law has always been constitutive of the ego. Slaves and paupers had no individuality. The "premise of all my acting in the sensuous world, can only be as part of that sensuous world, if I live amongst other free beings. This determined part of the world . . . is called . . . my *property*."<sup>1</sup> The concept of the ego "must also will a future state to exist, which shall have resulted from the present state, in consequence of the rule which he followed when he resolved upon his act of causality."<sup>2</sup> Property and the orderly functioning of property relations were the referents of the notion of one's own past and future. Today the individual ego has been absorbed by the pseudo-ego of totalitarian planning. Even those who hatch the totalitarian plan, despite and because of the huge mass and capital over which they dispose, have as little autonomy as those they control. The latter are organized in all sorts of groups, and in these the individual is but an element possessing no importance in himself. If he wants to preserve himself he must work as part of a team, ready and skilled in everything, whether in industry, agriculture or sport. In every camp he must defend his physical existence, his working, eating and sleeping place, must give and take cuffs and blows and submit to the toughest discipline. The responsibility of long term planning for himself and his family has given way to the ability to adjust himself to mechanical tasks of the moment. The individual constricts himself. Without dream or history, he is always watchful and ready, always aiming at some immediate practical goal. His life falls into a sequence of data which fit in advance the questionnaires he has to answer. He takes the spoken word only as a medium of information, orientation, and command. The semantic dissolution of language into a system of signs, as undertaken by modern<sup>7</sup> logistics, transcends the realm of logic. It draws its conclusions from a state of affairs which surrenders language to

<sup>1</sup> I. G. Fichte, *The Science of Ethics*, transl. by A. E. Kroeger, New York 1897, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> I. G. Fichte, *The Science of Rights*, transl. by A. E. Kroeger, London 1889, p. 167.

the rule of monopoly. To be accepted, men must sound like the vocal chords of the radio, film, and magazine. For in point of fact no one seems to make his living by himself, and everyone is suspect in mass society. Everyone needs a permanent alibi. The individual no longer has any future to care for, he has only to be ready to adapt himself, to follow orders, to pull levers, to perform ever different things which are ever the same. The social unit is no longer the family but the atomic individual, and the struggle for life consists in his resolving not to be annihilated at any moment in the world of apparatuses, engines, and handles.

Bodily strength is not the chief point, but it is important enough. To a large extent, it is not a natural quality. It is a product of the social division of labor, one that is necessary for production and supplied by whole strata of society to whom no other reason for existence was left except to supply it. Those among the dominated strata who excel in brute force reflect the injustice that the ox which treads out the corn has always been muzzled. Culture was the attempt to tame this element of brute force immanent in the principle of bodily strength. Such taming, however, concealed the fact that physical exertion remained the kernel of work. The counterpart of this concealment was the glorification of bodily strength in ideology, expressed in encomia to every brand of greatness,—intellectual giants as well as muscle men at county fairs, in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in the monster stadium. Today the ideological veil has been lifted and the principle of bodily strength has been openly propagated in the form of strongarm methods and purges.

Contemporary individuals, however, need presence of mind even more than muscles; the ready response is what counts, affinity to every kind of machine, technical, athletic, political. Previously, men were mere appendages to the machine, today they are appendages as such. Reflective thought and theory lose their meaning in the struggle for self-preservation. Fifty years ago psychological experience, skillful argumentation, foresight in business were still instruments of progress in society. Prior to the mechanization of the office, even the accountant had to use not only his dexterity but also his intellect. With the total incorporation of the enterprise into the realm of monopoly, rational argumentation loses its force. It now bears the hallmarks of that sales talk in the service of which it was formerly used, and which the victorious monopoly can dispense with. The distrust which peasants and children display for glib persons has always preserved the notion of that injustice which made language the servant of gain. The muteness of men today is largely to

be blamed on language which once was only too eloquent against them.

Today man needs factual knowledge, the automaton ability to react correctly, but he does not need that quiet consideration of diverse possibilities which presupposes the freedom and leisure of choice. The liberty which the market offered to the producers, consumers, and their multifold intermediaries, although it may have been abstract and deceptive, had at least permitted a certain range of deliberation. In the monopolistic apparatus none possesses that time and range. Each has to respond quickly, to innervate promptly. Under totalitarian planning men are dominated by the means of production even more than they were under the market system. Lack of efficiency is a capital offense. The brief period of spare time which still remains to men in their daily lives is now protected against waste. The danger that it will degenerate into otiosity, a state always despised so much by industry, is warded off. Since Descartes, philosophy was one great attempt to place itself as science in the service of the prevailing mode of production, an attempt opposed only by very few thinkers. With the abolition of *otium* and of the ego no aloof thinking is left. The social atoms, though they may still yearn for liberation, have lost the speculative sense, in the good and bad connotation of that term. The outlook is dark for philosophy. Without *otium* philosophical thought is impossible, cannot be conceived or understood. In such a state of affairs the argumentative procedure of traditional philosophy appears as helpless and idle talk. At the last minute phenomenology attempted, paradoxically enough, to elaborate a mode of thinking without disputation, but positivism, in which this philosophy originated, became its heir. It removed thought from philosophy and reduced the latter to the technique of organizing, by reproduction and abridgment, the matters of fact given in the world of sense. In positivism reason sustains itself through self-liquidation.

With the decline of the ego and its reflective reason, human relationships tend to a point wherein the rule of economy over all personal relationships, the universal control of commodities over the totality of life, turns into a new and naked form of command and obedience. No longer buttressed by small scale property, the school and the home are losing their educational function of preparing men for life in society. Living and being prepared have become one and the same thing, just as with the military profession. In school the hierarchy of sport and gymnastics triumphs over the classroom hierarchy which has never been accepted whole-heartedly by children anyhow.



The disputed authority of the teacher decreases in favor of an unconditional and anonymous, but ever-present, authority whose demands now have preference. This is the authority of the omnipotent standards of mass society. The qualities which the child needs in this society are imposed upon him by the collectivity of the school class, and the latter is but a segment of the strictly organized society itself. The teacher has the choice of winning the pupil's favor, even by harshness if need be, or of being ridiculed. Compared with the skills which are required of the individual today, the curriculum possesses only a subordinate value. Children learn quickly to know the automobile and radio inside out. They are born with this knowledge, which is not essentially different from knowledge of the most complicated machine, and they can do without science. School physics is obsolete in a twofold sense: it is equally remote from the mathematical consequences of relativity and quantum theory (which have long since passed beyond the limits of representation) and from the practical dexterity which alone matters to the pupil. The teacher cannot mediate between the realm of theory and practice, since the transition from practical observation to theory is no longer recognizable. The highest theory is still a mode of blind technique, as much as repair work is. Both are accomplished by sheer skill, the one in the study, the other in the shop. The difficulties which the theoretical physicist experiences when asked to cross from his mathematical syntheses of different conceptual realms to the world of objects is about the same as the inability of the most skillful mechanic to cross from manipulation of the motor to the principles of its working. Physical knowledge is split into knowledge of handling and knowledge of fields, and this cleavage resulting from the division of labor affects the student's relation to knowledge as such. The exploration of meanings is replaced by an acquaintance with functions. The animistic carryovers of theory are weeded out and this triumph at the same time implies a *sacrificium intellectus*. Technical practice can get along without physics, just as the film star can get along without an apprenticeship and the Fascist statesman without learning. Education is no longer a process taking place between individuals, as it was when the father prepared his son to take over his property, and the teacher supported him. Present day education is directly carried out by society itself and takes place behind the back of the family.

Childhood becomes a historical phenomenon. Christianity inaugurated the idea of childhood in its glorification of the weak, and the bourgeois family sometimes made that idea a reality. During the Christian era up to the Enlightenment, however, reason operated

on the child as an external compulsion to self-preservation which crushed everything that could not defend itself. The sculpture and painting of the middle ages, which did not differentiate between physically and socially inferior beings, revealed the secret of the *ordo* and hierarchy, namely, who could with impunity beat whom. Children who in the Christian world suffered the tortures of Hell were, in the Enlightenment world, rewarded with the Christian heaven. Happiness shall be theirs because they have been chosen as the symbols of innocence. In his adoration of his children the enlightened business man of the 19th century could mourn his lost religion without becoming superstitious. Children symbolized the Golden Age as well as the promising future. The rationalistic society gave children legends and fairy tales so that they might mirror hope back to their disillusioned elders. The latter created the idyll of childhood in order to escape between the horns of sober knowledge and ideology, from a dilemma which, in the face of ever threatening social upheavals, they could not resolve. The child ideal reflected the truth within the lie that kept the underlying population in line, the utopia of eternal happiness. This utopia was the place of last resort for the religious ideals of those times in which the bourgeois themselves were still among the underlying.

They can do without this utopia today. In monopolistic society childhood and adolescence have become mere biological processes. Puberty is no longer a human crisis, for the child is grown up as soon as he can walk, and the grown-up in principle always remains the same. Development has ceased to exist. During the heyday of the family the father represented the authority of society to the child, and puberty was the inevitable conflict between these two. Today, however, the child stands face to face with society at once, and the conflict is decided even before it arises. The world is so possessed by the power of what is and the efforts of adjustment to it, that the adolescent's rebellion, which once fought the father because his practices contradicted his own ideology, can no longer crop up. The process which hardens men by breaking down their individuality—a process consciously and planfully undertaken in the various camps of Fascism—takes place tacitly and mechanically in them everywhere under mass culture, and at such an early age that when children come to consciousness everything is settled. Since Freud, the relation between father and son has been reversed. Now, the rapidly changing society which passes its judgment upon the old is represented not by the father but by the child. The child, not the father, stands for reality. The awe which the Hitler youth enjoys from his parents is but the pointed political expression of a

universal state of affairs. This new relationship affects even the very first years of life during which father image and super-ego are supposed to arise. Psychologically, the father is represented not by another individual but replaced by the world of things and by the crowd to which the boy is tied.

The elimination of the conflict between individual and society also affects love. With the passing of the authority of the father the danger of catastrophic conflicts with the family fades away. Yet they had kindled abandon. Today sex seems to be emancipated and still oppression goes on. Social regimentation of the relations between the sexes had gone far before racial eugenics consummated this process; it was expressed by the standardized normalcy in all spheres of mass culture. Eugenics has its roots in the Enlightenment. Science objectified sex until it could be manipulated. In its inhuman soberness Kant's definition of marriage as a contract for the mutual possession of the sexual organs indicts inhuman sexual privileges according to the standards of natural law. This definition had, in the 19th century, made its way into the practice of men. In contemporary mass society, the sexes are levelled in that both regard their sex as a thing over which they dispose without illusion. Girls strive to come off as well as they can in the competition with other girls, and, in their eyes, flirtation enhances prestige rather than future pleasure. With Kant, they take sex as a property possessing an exchange value. Wedekind once demanded freedom of prostitution because he thought that women could catch up with male society only through conscious use of their sole monopoly. The modern girl, however, wins her freedom by exploiting the patriarchal taboo which humiliates her by placing her on a pedestal. Sex loses its power over men. It is turned on and off according to the requirements of the situation. Men no longer lose themselves in it, they are neither moved nor blinded by love. Under National Socialism extra-marital intercourse is among activities encouraged by the state as socially useful forms of labor. Love is organized by the state. During good times, children are trained as future heirs; during bad times, as prospective breadwinners for their parents; under Fascism they are produced under the auspices of the state and delivered to it as a kind of tax, if one can still speak of taxes in a society wherein one group of magnates exploits all the rest of the population. Taxes have an obvious significance under Fascism. With property owners they contribute to accelerating the process of centralization and to beating down weaker competitors. With the masses their money form becomes transparent and shows forth as toil in the service of power. Part of this toil is the labor of childbirth. Under

National Socialism the girl's refusal of herself to men in uniform is deemed to be as unbecoming as ready surrender formerly was. In Germany the image of the Virgin Mary had never quite replaced the archaic cult of the woman. Under the surface of Christian civilization memories of matriarchal conditions were never quite extinguished. These vestiges continued to assert themselves in the common antipathy to the old spinster as well as in the German *Lied's* devotion to the deserted mistress, long before National Socialists ostracized prudes and celebrated illegitimate mothers. But the ascetic beatitude of the Christian virgin by far surpassed the pleasure authorized by the National Socialist regime and fed with memories of the buried past. The National Socialist regime rationalizes the mythical past which it pretends to conserve, calling it by name and mobilizing it on behalf of big industry. Where this archaic heritage did not explode the Christian form and assume Teutonic features it gave to German philosophy and music their specific tone. The mythology in National Socialism is not a mere fake, but the spotlight thrown upon this surviving mythology liquidates it altogether. National Socialism has thus accomplished in a few years what other civilizations took centuries to achieve.

The sexual freedom prescribed by the population policy does not cure the anxiety of the world of sexual taboos but expresses mere scorn of love. Love is the irreconcilable foe of the prevailing rationality, for lovers preserve and protect neither themselves nor the collectivity. They throw themselves away; that is why wrath is heaped upon them. Romeo and Juliet died in conflict with society for that which was heralded by this society. In unreasonably surrendering themselves to one another they sustained the freedom of the individual as against the dominion of the world of things. Those who "pollute the race" in National Socialist Germany remain loyal to the life and death of these lovers. In the inhuman world of National Socialism, which reserves the name of hero to clever yet beguiled youths who in conceiving, begetting and dying are but victims of a monstrous population policy, the racial crime resurrects what once was called heroism, namely, loyalty without prospect and reason. The sad tryst of those who cannot change their ways is blinded to the rationality which triumphs outside. The daybreak in which the SS men surprise the careless, lights up the monstrosity that reason has become—ingenuity, cleverness and readiness to strike. These lovers have not kept pace with the course of society and therefore cannot hope for its clemency in the streamlined world. Their agony in the concentration camp, which the shrewd adherents of the Third Reich deem right and just because

those punished were neither reasonable nor clever, reveals the truth behind Fascism's emancipation of sex and behind the concession existence it entails. What is encouraged as wholesome sexuality is an expression of the same fiendish rationality that harries love.

What Fascism does to the victims it selects as examples for its unlimited power seems to defy all reason. Its tortures transcend the power to perceive or imagine; when thought attempts to comprehend the deed it stiffens with horror and is rendered helpless. The new order contradicts reason so fundamentally that reason does not dare to doubt it. Even the consciousness of oppression fades. The more incommensurate become the concentration of power and the helplessness of the individual, the more difficult for him to penetrate the human origin of his misery. The tattered veil of money has been replaced by the veil of technology. The centralization of production which technology has made necessary conceals the voluntary concord among its leaders. More than ever crises take the guise of natural and inevitable phenomena and tend to destroy entire populations as they ravage continents for reserve supplies. The dimensions of this process are so superhuman that even the imagination which has withstood the mutilation of mass culture hesitates to derive this state of affairs from its social origin.

Injustice has never been more blindly accepted as a visitation of superhuman fate than it is under the spell of Fascism today, when everyone talks of revamping society. Hope has been overshadowed by the consciousness of universal doom. Everyone feels that his work perpetuates an infernal machine from which he manages to wheedle enough time to live, time that he proceeds to lose back by attending the machine. Thus he keeps going, expert in handling every situation and in understanding none, scorning death and yet fleeing it. To men in the bourgeois era individual life was of infinite importance because death meant absolute catastrophe. Hamlet's line, "the rest is silence," in which death is followed by oblivion, indicates the origin of the ego. Fascism shatters this fundamental principle. It strikes down that which is tottering, the individual, by teaching him to fear something worse than death. Fear reaches farther than the identity of his consciousness. The individual must abandon the ego and carry on somehow without it. Under Fascism the objects of organization are being disorganized as subjects. They lose their identical character, and are simultaneously Nazi and anti-Nazi, convinced and skeptical, brave and cowardly, clever and stupid. They have renounced all consistency. This inconsistency

into which the ego has been dissolved is the only attitude adequate to a reality which is not defined by so-called plans but by concentration camps. The method of this madness consists in demonstrating to men that they are just as shattered as those in the camps and by this means welding the racial community together. Men have been released from such camps who have taken over the jargon of their jailers and with cold reason and mad consent (the price, as it were, of their survival) tell their story as if it could not have been otherwise than it was, contending that they have not been treated so badly after all. Those who have not yet been jailed behave as if they had already been tortured. They profess everything. The murderers, on the other hand, have adopted the language of the Berlin night club and garment center. The sphere of trade and business remains a reality only in the struggles and transactions among captains of industry and is there removed from the eye of the little man, nay, even of the big man. But the language of market mentality, Jewish slang, the vernacular of salesmen and traders who have long been humiliated, survive on the lips of their suppressors. It is the language of winks, sly hints, complicity in deceit. The Nazis call failure *Pleite*, he who does not watch his step in time is *meschugge*, and an anti-Semitic song says that the Americans have no idea *was sich tut*. The instigators justify their pogrom by saying that once again all was not quite *koscher* with the Jews. Getting through by hook or crook is the secret ideal, and even the SA troopers envy the Jewish brains which they cudgel. They imagine that the Jewish shrewdness they strive to imitate, reflects the truth which they have to deny to themselves and to destroy. If this truth has once and for all been discarded and men have decided for integral adjustment, if reason has been purged of all morality regardless of cost, and has triumphed over all else, no one may remain outside and look on. The existence of one solitary "unreasonable" man elucidates the shame of the entire nation. His existence testifies to the relativity of the system of radical self-preservation that has been posited as absolute. If all superstition has been abolished to such a degree that only superstition remains, no stubborn man may wander around and seek happiness anywhere except in unrelenting progress. The hatred of Jews, like the lust to murder the insane, is stimulated by their unintelligible faith in a God who has everywhere deserted them and by the unconditional rigidity of the principle they maintain even unwittingly. Suspicion of madness is the unperishable source of persecution. It originates from distrust of one's own pragmatic reason.

Pain is the means of calling men back from the noumenal world into which all empiristic philosophers and even Kant forbade them to penetrate. It was always the best teacher to bring men to reason. Pain leads the resistant and wayward, the phantast and utopian back to themselves. It reduces them to the body, to part of the body. Pain levels and equalizes everything, man and man, man and animal. It absorbs the entire life of the being whom it racks, reducing him to a husk of pain. Mutilation of the ego, with which the whole of mankind has been afflicted, thus again repeats itself in each case of torture. The practical requirements that enmesh man at every moment, the pragmatic rationality of the industrial era, completely absorb the lives of their victims. Pain is the archetype of labor in a divided society and at the same time its organon. Philosophers and theologians have always exalted it. Their paeans to it reflect the fact that mankind has hitherto known labor only as an effluence of domination. They justify pain because it drives men to reason. Luther translates the 90th psalm as "Teach us to learn we must die in order to become prudent." Kant says that "Pain is the sting of activity,"<sup>1</sup> and Voltaire that "this feeling of pain was indispensable to stimulate us to self-preservation."<sup>2</sup> The Inquisitors once justified their abominable service to their predatory rulers by saying that they were commissioned to save the errant soul or to wash out its sins. Their language already pictures heaven as a kind of Third Reich which the unreliable and scandalous could attain by way of a training camp. If one of these unhappy victims of the Inquisition escaped, requests were issued for his extradition describing him "as one insanely led to reject the salutary medicine offered for his cure, and to spurn the wine and oil which were soothing his wounds."<sup>3</sup> The inquisition manifested the rage of those who sensed that the inculcation of Christianity had not quite successfully been accomplished, a rage which later, in Fascism, led to open repudiation of Christianity. Fascism has reinstated pain on its throne. During the breathing spells of civilization, at least in the civilized mother countries, brute physical pain was inflicted only upon the abjectly poor; to others it loomed on the horizon only as the *ultima ratio* of society. Under Fascism society has invoked this *ultima ratio*. The contradiction between what is requested of man and what can be offered to him has become so striking, the ideology so thin, the discontents in civilization so great that they must be compensated

<sup>1</sup>*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 61.

<sup>2</sup>Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*. Article on "Good" in The Works of Voltaire, New York 1901, Vol. V, p. 264.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, New York 1922, Vol. I, p. 459.

through annihilation of those who do not conform, political enemies, Jews, asocial persons, the insane. The new order of Fascism is Reason revealing itself as unreason.

What remains of reason in its contemporary decline, however, is not just the perseverance of self-preservation and the persistence of that horror in which it culminates. The age old definition of reason in terms of self-preservation already implied the curtailment of reason itself. The propositions of idealistic philosophy that reason distinguishes man from the animal (propositions in which the animal is humiliated just as man is in the converse propositions of the materialist doctors) contain the truth that through reason man frees himself of the fetters of nature. This liberation, however, does not entitle man to dominate nature (as the philosophers held) but to comprehend it. Society, governed by the self-preserving rationality of *élites*, has always also preserved the life of the masses, although in a wrong and accidental form. Reason has borne a true relation not only to one's own existence but to living as such; this function of transcending self-preservation is concomitant with self-preservation, with obeying and adapting to objective ends. Reason could recognize and denounce the forms of injustice and thus emancipate itself from them. As the faculty of calling things by their name, reason is more than the alienated life that preserves itself in the destruction of others and of itself. To be sure, reason cannot hope to keep aloof from history and to intuit the true order of things, as ontological ideologies contend. In the inferno to which triumphant reason has reduced the world it loses its illusions, but in doing so it becomes capable of facing this inferno and recognizing it for what it is. Skepticism has done its job. Ideals seem so futile today that they can change as rapidly as agreements and alliances do. Ideology consists more in what men are like than in what they believe—in their mental constrictedness, their complete dependence upon associations. They experience everything only within the conventional framework of concepts. Any object is comprised under the accepted schemata even before it is perceived. This and not the convictions of men constitutes the false consciousness of today. Today the ideological incorporation of men into society takes place through their "biological" pre-formation for the controlled collectivity. Even the unique becomes a function and appendage of the centralized economy. Culture, exalting the unique as the resistive element amid a universal sameness of things is an ingredient rather than an opponent of mass culture; the unique becomes the shingle of monopoly. The essence of Paris and of Austria had become merely a function of that America from which they differed. The self in.



dissolution becomes recognizable as ideology. It was not only the basis of modern self-preservation but also the veil concealing the forces that destroyed it. What applies to the unique equally applies to the living self. With the dissolution of the self the disproportionate reaches of power become the only obstacle to insight into their obsolescence. Mutilated as men are, in the duration of a brief moment they can become aware that in the world which has been thoroughly rationalized they can dispense with the interests of self-preservation which still set them one against the other. The terror which pushes reason is at the same time the last means of stopping it, so close has truth come. If the atomized and disintegrating men of today have become capable of living without property, without location, without time, they also have abandoned the ego in which all prudence and all stupidity of historical reason as well as its compliance with domination was sustained. The progress of reason that leads to its self-destruction has come to an end; there is nothing left but barbarism or freedom.

