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MODERNITY AND EVIL:

SOME SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

ON THE PROBLEM OF MEANING

It is often said that religious disaffection is largely the result, not so much of intellectual doubts, as of the experiential sense of the world's suffering and injustice. Much of the Enlightenment polemic revolved around the problem of the theodicy [1], and, according to a survey of the attitudes of German proletarians in 1906, the majority's religious disbelief appeared to stem from the failure of religious systems to cope adequately with the "'injustice' of the order of the world."[2]

In the same essay, however, Weber distinguishes three radical attempts to answer the problems posed by the world's imperfec-

[1] J. Lively (ed.), *The Enlightenment*, London, 1966, pp. 152-3.
[2] M. Weber, "Social Psychology of the World Religions," in H. Gerth and C. Mills, *From Max Weber*, London, 1947, pp. 275-6.

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tions. These, he claimed, "...give rationally satisfying answers for the basis of the incongruity between destiny and merit, the Indian doctrine of Kharma, Zoroastrian dualism, the predestination decree of the *deus absconditus*. These solutions are rationally closed; in pure form, they are found only as exceptions."[3]

Three problems arise. First, is there a contradiction between Weber's assertions of the 'rational' success of the religious solutions and of continuing mass disbelief? Second, what are the sociological grounds for suggesting that, not scientific argument, but the sense of moral meaninglessness lies at the root of religious disaffection? Finally, if the suggestion *can* be well attested, how can we explain the rise and contemporary incidence of this fatal sensibility?

I

The first problem can be put into perspective if we bear in mind that, historically, there have been two concurrent and often overlapping debates on the 'problem of evil,' a concise philosophical controversy and a more diffuse social-psychological one. This is something Obeyesekere appears to overlook in accusing Weber of confusion in his use of the term 'theodicy.'[4] According to the latter, Weber shifts between three meanings, 1) the Leibnizian logodicy, i.e. the vindication of God's ways by reason rather than faith (as maintained by his opponent Bayle), 2) any existential need to explain human suffering and evil, and 3) the resolution of such needs in statements of moral meaning. (Closer reading of the key passages shows that we can rule out the second meaning, since 'theodicy' for Weber is not a need or a phenomenon, but a type of solution, a supramundane justification, as the etymology suggests; he is careful to describe the impulse for such solutions as 'the need for a theodicy' or 'the problem of theodicy,' e.g. kharma is "the most complete solution to the problem of theodicy.")

[3] M. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 275 and his *Sociology of Religion*, tr. by E. Fischoff, Methuen, 1965, pp. 138-150.

[4] G. Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Sin and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism," in E. R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, No. 5, 1968.

Obeyesekere's solution presupposes the analytic priority of the classical Western philosophical debate to decide the true meaning to be attributed to the term. Resolving the problem of theodicy, he argues, is a matter of logic, not psychology: a religious system must seek to explain 'logically' human suffering in terms of its system of beliefs.

But Weber explicitly refuses to equate his use of the term 'rational' with the narrower 'logical'; 'inner consistency' is not the same as 'logical' consistency, and there are several meanings of 'rationality' beyond the (Western) method of induction and experiment.[5] He further insists on grouping together on the same level of meaning for comparative purposes the three radical theodicies which Obeyesekere wishes to dissociate. Thirdly, it is to the problem of the world's imperfections, of *suffering* in general, that theodicies address themselves for Weber, not simply to injustice. Hence, even if Weber was originally led to pose the problem of evil in a classical philosophical sense because of his Lutheran orientations,[6] his mature reflections presuppose the wider sociological perspective of 'meaning' and are devoid of ethnocentric preconceptions. 'Theodicy' is a term with important psychological and cultural dimensions, and the resolution achieved is a function of human and social satisfactions in a given environment. Inner consistency is in this case shaped as much by psychology as by reasonings.

This is not to deny the importance of the philosophical issue. Very briefly, it arises in acute form only in a monotheist system, where a purely logical contradiction appears when we assert that 1) God is omnipotent (and omniscient), 2) He is perfect, 3) there is imperfection and evil in the world. Conceivably, if it could be shown that God had a morally sufficient reason for introducing evil into the world, the contradiction might be avoided; or, at least, until we could demonstrate conclusively that He had (or could have) none, the case for contradiction would remain unproven.[7] But the method of transferring the *onus probandi*

[5] M. Weber, "Social Psychology..." in *op. cit.*, pp. 293-4.

[6] As pointed out by B. Nelson in his review of Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, A.S.R. 1965.

[7] Classical and recent philosophical arguments are collected in N. Pike (ed.), *God and Evil*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1964.

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only answers Hume's first set of arguments, his logical attack.[8] It is ill equipped to deal with Hume's moral arraignment of a Providence which we have allowed to be unself-contradictory in His actions, whose purpose still remains irreconcilable with the divinely-created human concepts of compassion and justice. The argument, which is now moral and psychological, marks the shift from the narrower debate of a Leibniz, who in effect qualified the attribute of omnipotence to allow man free will, to the social psychological critique of Ivan Karamazov who affirms the omnipotence of the Creator only the more devastatingly to deny His creation and strip Him of the attribute of perfection. We have moved from the use of rationalist philosophy as the weapon of intellectuals against *faith*, to that of sociology and psychology, open to far wider circles, against the constraints of *tradition*.

The philosophical debate is confined to Western religions. But the social psychological critique, involving as it does an attack on the conception of the world as somehow a meaningful moral order, allows comparison with Eastern religions; for they too, particularly in their less philosophical and more popular manifestations,[9] postulate partial reconciliations with this world insofar as they allow to it a soteriological efficacy through the succession of higher reincarnations effected by 'good deeds.' Only Manichaeanism and the most radical forms of Buddhism in fact escape this critique, and even here only in certain respects; to call the world 'evil' or 'illusory' is to make it part of a morally significant whole.

There is another reason for distinguishing between the two debates on the 'problem of evil.' The typical rationalist opposition of 'reason' to 'faith' is confined to an educated elite, e.g. Mu'tazilites or the Spanish-Jewish philosophers; whereas the social psychological experience of the discrepancy between destiny and merit is widely diffused. The elaboration of theodicies may indeed be the work of rationalist intellectuals, scholarly or pro-

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[8] D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, X & XI, in R. Wollheim (ed.), *Hume on Religion*, London and Glasgow, 1963.

[9] As M. Spiro argues in his "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966.

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phetic, but they direct their solutions to the expressed needs of the majority.[10]

If Weber was therefore right to separate the two senses of 'theodicy,' the philosophical and the social psychological, we should also recognise the analytic distinction between the two debates. The sociologist, concerned with the second issue, may now be in a position to resolve the apparent contradiction in Weber between the 'rational' (i.e. social psychological) success of certain religious systems and mass disbelief caused by the sense of moral meaninglessness. These systems through their characteristic theodicies did once satisfy large numbers of people, but they no longer do so. Or rather, for many they cannot satisfy. Since their aims were not philosophical, they solved no 'logical' problems. Their 'rational' success, their 'inner consistency,' lay solely in their ability to systematise a world image that was once psychologically satisfying and socially complete.

II

To clarify the significance of this crucial transformation of thought and attitude, we need to distinguish the universal general conditions of this transformation, and the more specific processes or 'routes' by which it was achieved. And we can approach the general conditions by making use of the sociological categories of 'tradition' and 'modernity' to characterise certain features of ideologies.

All theodicies are characterised by their peculiar involvement in a hierarchical set of all-embracing relationships. Kharma, predestination, fate, chastisement, dualism—all are rooted in the idea of a sacred drama underlying and defining the cosmos, and hence society. This applies equally to cyclical as to purposive theodicies. They enact a transhistorical drama with divine and human characters, which illuminate a complex of relations of power and dependence. Certain events, certain qualities and states of being, abstracted from the world's flux, are welded into a construct and transferred into an enlarged supramundane setting, peopled

[10] Cf. Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, ch. 8.

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by gods and heroes. We deal in these theodicies, not with the 'world,' i.e. society in its natural and historical context, but with the 'cosmos,' a balanced and stable moral order and conceptual framework for terrestrial existence. As moderns, we tend to analyse this order into its components—we see 'another world' reflecting, or balancing, or completing, a 'natural' and a 'social' world. But the mark of the 'traditional' standpoint is that the social and natural spheres are encapsulated in the supramundane, or, as in the ancient Near East, impregnated with it. Together they form a cosmic whole composed of fixed, or at least self-reequilibrating, positions, usually meeting in the Janus-figure of the ruler who symbolises the unity of the spheres.[11] Together also, they compose a 'higher harmony' whose truth explains by its overall totality individual experiences; in this whole, man's existence is a meaningless inartistic fragment, unless related to the cosmos. To understand the world is to forsake man's necessarily partial for God's (or the enlightened one's) comprehensive and timeless view. Specific sequences of events and structural processes, the material of historical and sociological understanding, are for the traditional mind simply quarries for didactic illustration of the power and functioning of the divine order, and of man's role in this cosmic drama.[12]

The chief point about all these doctrines is that man, whether he be required to live more or less fully in this world, has a point of reference that is external to nature and society, while his judgments on the latter are extrinsic to their characteristics. It is the cosmos that has 'value,' not history nor man's activities. History is devoid of any 'authority' or meaning; it is merely a reflection, or a laboratory, or a witness to the failure, of the divine. Myth and religion, as Eliade remarks, call man to a sacred Centre or primordial Time outside himself and the world, a profane world whose meaning derives solely from its ontological

[11] H. Frankfurt et al., *Before Philosophy*, Middlesex (Penguin) 1957, pp. 12-14, 241-5; cf. also his *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948.

[12] According to Frankfurt, *op. cit.*, p. 245, early Judaism partly broke with this conception in devaluing nature for history as the arena of the divine salvation drama. But the Hebraic conception of 'history' remained heavily 'mythopoeic,' and later developments in Judaism, as well as in Christianity and Islam, all sought in varying ways to reintegrate the social and natural worlds into a cosmic whole around a more purposive axis.

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dependence on the powers of a transcendent order.[13] Purpose and plan are attributes, not of men and societies, but of the cosmos itself.

These teleological dramas stand in sharp contrast to the causal-historical conceptions of the contemporary epoch. Modern *Welt-anschauungen* are anthropocentric, secular and historical. The 'drama' of nationalism, communism and existentialism, for all its apparent continuities with the sacred cosmic dramas, is of a differ-ent order. It springs from a generalised analysis of man's partic-ular situations; it aims to serve man as man, or man in society, but not as a participant in some suprasocial higher order. This collapse of transcendence into immanence, strikingly symbolised in Nietzsche's conception of Eternal Recurrence,[14] has even per-meated some modern theology, particularly the radical 'Death of God' variety in America. Not content to take the passing of the transcendent deity as given, these theologians actually *will* the event, to embrace more fully profane existence in this world. God, the need-fulfiller and problem-solver, bars that 'coming of age of man,' that secular world affirmation preached by Bonhoeffer, which they desire. Only an eschatological ethic, and the hope of finding the immanent God in the heart of the profane, prevents them crossing over into a Feuerbachian atheism.[15]

Recent, and perhaps as yet uninfluential, this striking American Protestant theological formulation points up clearly two deeper and broader contemporary trends: first, the public nature of the 'event' of the "absence of the experience of God" predicted by Nietzsche's Madman[16]; and, second, the underlying extrovert, but qualified, optimism of modernisation and the modernising man, grappling with the external problems of his situation with a seriousness which stems from his new consciousness of the increase in the range of his options and responsibilities. Now it is this consciousness which, we argue, has made possible the characteristic modern sense of irrelevance of all the traditional

[13] M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, London & Glasgow, 1968, Collins (Fontana).

[14] F. Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Pt. III.

[15] T.J.J. Altizer and W. Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, Middlesex (Penguin), 1968.

[16] F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, No. 125.

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religious conceptions. As Hamilton puts it, "And in the world, as we have seen, there is no need for religion and no need for God. This means that we refuse to consent to the traditional interpretation of the world as a shadow-screen of unreality, masking or concealing the eternal which is the only true reality. This refusal is made inevitable by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.... The world of experience is real, and it is necessary and right to be actively engaged in changing its patterns and structures."[17] Likewise for a Van Buren, for whom analytical philosophy has made it impossible to talk meaningfully about God, the salutary rise of science and technology with their empiricist assumptions has once and for all put an end to "the mythological view of the world" and therefore the "historical 'drama of salvation.'"[18]

There are of course other 'pessimist' trends in modern religious thinking, e.g. the interwar Christian pessimism of Niebuhr, Barth and Tillich. But even these schools take as their starting point the dynamic possibility of a this-worldly 'better man' which they then contrast with the depressing reality. And the more dominant note of optimism can be found in the 'reformist' movements in Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism, although they are not so theologically radical. But there is the same rejection of Gnosticism, magic and superstitious and formalistic accretions, and of the previous passive acquiescence, outside history; the same concern with man's social and political development, and his psychological betterment, as preconditions of this-worldly salvation. Ignoring local variations, they express an indirect response to the challenge posed to religious tradition of the Western-exported scientific revolution.

We can now reformulate Weber's paradox as follows. Until the rapid advance in science and technology, there was no external criterion for judging the efficacy of the cosmic world-images, only an internal evaluation, on the basis of their 'inner consistency,' as measured less by tests of (Aristotelian) logic than by social psychological relevance. These world-images framed man's conceptualisation and understanding of pain and injustice.

[17] W. Hamilton, "The Death of God Theologies Today," in T.J.J. Altizer and W. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[18] P. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, London, SCM, 1963.

Their 'success' was achieved by their ability to limit, offset and relativise through complementary conceptions the acute perception of those 'breaking points' of human existence, the problems of contingency, impotence and scarcity.[19]

The scientific revolution introduced the possibility of a new kind of test of the sociological (and intellectual) efficacy of these theodicies. The cosmos was shrunk. The supraempirical plane, the ground of man's existence, gradually lost its relevance. The historical world of nature and society filled the vacuum. No longer was Mount Meru or the heavenly Zion the centre of the universe; earthly centres, the historical Burma and the physical Palestine, filled men's imaginations and exercised their loyalties.[20] The sacred time was no longer located before the Fall or in the Age of Companions; men now looked to the immediate future for the revival of a former splendour or the realisation of the good society. The promise of science and its social agents thrust men out of their age-long dependence on an overpowering universal cosmos into their particular historical roles. Science offered men, who were no longer passive objects of destiny, methods of eliminating suffering and not just of explaining it by conceptually transcending it. It was now possible to intervene effectively in the social order and 'make history.' It required only time and experience to make of man a more effective interventionist, a more potent historical actor.

Religious disaffection therefore was a result of a new type of doubt, a new sense of irrelevance, in the new conditions. It was not caused by the inadequacies of the religious traditions by themselves, much less of course by purely intellectual doubts about God's existence. Inadequacies had always been sensed, but this new kind of doubt gained force only when the rise of science and its applications (particularly the 'scientific state') opened up alternative routes for coping with the traditional problems. When man found that his own actions based on calculative science

[19] T. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion*, ch. 1, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1966.

[20] For Burma's Buddhist transformation in the early twentieth century, cf. E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, The Hague, 1964. For the conversion of Jewish religious messianism into historical Zionism, cf. A. Hertzberg (ed.), *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959.

could bring new solutions to the old difficulties as well as the new ones to which these solutions gave rise, (e.g. urbanisation, mass culture, etc.), cosmic and divine problem-solving receded. The most radical of his former religious explanations lost its saving power. God vanished over the horizon.

III

The most interesting problem remains. If the old world-images, based on the conception that the cosmos constituted a morally meaningful order validating the terrestrial hierarchy, failed to satisfy in the new optimistic atmosphere generated by the successes of scientific endeavour, by what processes was this transformation from transcendental theodicy to immanentist historical ethic accomplished? Given this overall context as necessary condition of the breakdown, can we trace in more detail the stages of this transformation?

The answer would appear to illustrate another general sociological pattern to which Weber drew attention: the relative autonomy of complex cultural, especially religious, traditions, which have their own social 'logic.' The dissolution of these traditions and their theodicies needed the spur and setting of the technological revolution; but it was largely an internal process. The seeds of destruction lay in the very radicalism of the theodicies themselves, and were activated by a further systematic radicalisation which Weber documented for the rise, but not the fall, of these theodicies.[21]

The following brief analysis is confined to a particular facet of the problem of meaning, developed acutely in Western religious traditions—the ethical aspect, which stresses the unacceptability of injustice. Traditionally, God or fate is not to be questioned. He is just and the cosmos unfolds as a harmonious hierarchy, which only man or his actions offend. Most consistently expressed in the doctrine of the Fall, it appears forcefully in Isaiah: "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things... Woe unto him

[21] Especially in his *Ancient Judaism*.

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that striveth with His Maker! Let the potsherd strive with potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?"[22] Homer has a similar, if less socially apposite, picture: Zeus dispenses good and evil in roughly equal proportions to man from two jars at the gate of heaven, while in the Job-like Babylonian poem entitled 'I will praise the Lord of Wisdom,' the cause of unmerited misfortune is attributed solely to the inscrutable "will of the gods in heaven."[23]

Such justifications of the divine order, and its authors, face two tensions. The first which focuses on the consequent depreciation of man is usually accepted as a tolerable inconsistency, or cushioned by some doctrine of the Elect. Man may be regarded as potentially redeemable, or at least tragically noble, as capable of good works and sentiments. This is the contradiction which McIntyre diagnosed in the Weberian presentation of the Calvinist ethic, and which the notion of inscrutability hardly evades.[24]

The more serious challenge emerges with the gradual universalisation of the command to do justice. It is already present in Abraham's challenge to God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"[25] Job applies it systematically, turning the divinely-ordained morality on its author; but so strongly is 'authority' fused with 'value,' that divine omnipotence is still felt to justify the overriding of the questioning of men who are morally inconceivable outside the power order into which they have been inserted—like the grasshoppers of Isaiah's vision.[26]

In the new social and psychological conditions, however, this very omnipotence becomes a liability. It cannot guarantee by itself the source of a universal morality, for it no longer appears to fulfil itself on behalf of men, in contrast to the humbler social

[22] Isaiah 45; 7,9-10.

[23] Cited in G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, Middlesex (Penguin), 1964, pp. 99-100.

[24] A. McIntyre, "A Mistake in Causality in Social Science," in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman (eds.), *Politics, Philosophy and Society*, 2nd series, London, 1963.

[25] Genesis 18; 25.

[26] Isaiah 40; 21.

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instruments of science. In this contest for man's loyalty and affection, it is because 'value,' the commitment to universal principles felt to be totally binding, has been transferred to man and his purposes, and not because science is felt to be more powerful, to have greater 'authority,' legitimised efficacy, that God is dethroned.

Ivan Karamazov epitomises this transference. He does not disbelieve in God directly. Indeed, he accepts the divine power, and uses it as the basis of his fundamental contrast between the puny vision of his finite 'Euclidean' mind and the cosmic comprehension of the all-powerful creator. Not God's existence, nor his power, proves the stumbling-block, but the justice of his creation which permits the suffering of children. "If the sufferings of the children go to make up the sum of sufferings which is necessary for the purchase of truth, then I say beforehand that the entire truth is not worth such a price... I don't want harmony. I don't want it out of the love I bear to mankind... I'd rather remain with my suffering unavenged, and my indignation unappeased, *even if I were wrong.*"[27] As Camus points out, this involves Ivan in a double rebellion: he rejects the truth of mystery, with its prize of eternal life, because the price of injustice is impermissible ("all the knowledge in the world is not worth a child's tears"), and dismisses the possibility of personal salvation and privilege for himself, because others are damned and suffering continues. In the name of universal compassion, of a humanist 'value,' it becomes all or nothing, *and* all or none; a demand for complete freedom and total equality. For the humiliated innocent, Ivan refuses *on principle* the transcendent God's creation, along with all divine dramas of purifying suffering, unmerited election and ultimate harmony.[28] 'God' is now the name of an inner and immanent tormentor, who compels Ivan to refuse trust for the old but silent *deus absconditus* and the hidden unity of his cosmos. 'Value' is thus separated from 'authority' and transferred to suffering humanity which before had at most shared through grace in divine virtue.

[27] F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 2 vols., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, vol. I, p. 287 (tr. by David Magarshack).

[28] A. Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 50-8, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1962.

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Since the rebellion is incomplete, God remains 'authoritative'; yet the contradiction which this poses leads to an ambivalent double image of God as omnipotent creator and inner tormentor, transcendent and immanent simultaneously.

This ethical rebellion is a far more dangerous attack on traditional images than the previous Manichaean 'heresy.' Mani opposed an ideal realm of light to the encompassing world of darkness created by the evil demiurge. Man's aim should be to reach this distant realm ruled by a divine principle, the 'Kind Stranger,' which was morally perfect but limited in its power, possessing 'value' without 'authority.'[29] In the Dostoevsky passage, in contrast, God retains His omnipotence and so moral responsibility; that is why He can be tried and judged. In Mani's conception, a cosmic salvation drama can still be generated from the liberation of Man from his material prison among the forces of darkness, and this results from retaining 'value' as the distinctive attribute of God, His very self-definition. The Copernican revolution in Ivan's position lies exactly in stripping perfection, or even perfectibility, from the definition of the divine, and transferring these attributes to an idealised humanity. As a morally meaningful image, God and the divine order are dead in men's hearts; the heavens are ethically empty, a hostile alien to the ends of man.

Dostoevsky refuses to draw the full conclusions of this rebellion, because his terror at the moral emptiness of the cosmos is matched by his sense of man's inadequacy to inherit the mantle and fulfil the expectations inherent in the new concept of 'humanity' diffused by scientific optimism. Yet it is just this context of optimism which spreads the notion of man as rightful manipulator of his environment and faculties, which sets up 'humanity' as an effective rival for the acquisition of 'value,' against an authoritarian God and his hierarchical order. There had of course been previous attempts to transfer some 'value' to man, particularly

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[29] S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, Cambridge, 1964. (The use of the term 'value' is not dissimilar to that of J. Levenson who opposes it to an emotional commitment to 'history,' cf. his *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967. But in the present analysis, 'authority' replaces 'history' as the focus of emotional commitment until the transformation destroys it.)

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through mysticism,[30] but they could not be sustained for lack of confidence in man's power without divine aid; and it was this confidence which the applications of science in social institutions built up.

This growth in confidence in man's powers encourages a re-evaluation of his moral capacities and a consequent cosmic 'status reversal.' Man, freed of the burden of sin, confronts a God who is discovered to be cruel by his own moral standards. He loses even his 'authority,' and retains a power whose alien hostility leads to its overthrow, once it is shorn of the promise of salvation. For under modern conditions, men will not long consent to the worship of a power which is felt to rule only by coercion, since its promises seem forever unfulfillable.

So the implications of an ideology have been used to subvert it, much as the nationalists used the democratic values of their colonial oppressors to undermine their legitimacy and power. And just as the nationalist movement is the inheritor of the colonial-ist's 'authority' while previously attaching to itself the 'value' that was formerly his, so idealised humanity succeeds the divine image as the immanent god, uncompromised and absolute in its freedom.[31] Ivan himself rejects this outcome where scientific man becomes god within the only world, but the irony of his ethical radicalism is just this: in the name of man's eschatological freedom from the world (represented by the mysterious Stranger in the 'Grand Inquisitor'), he destroys all theodicies of cosmic contentment, but ends by making the 'world' and the 'history' he hates for its suffering, more, and not less, acceptable. In the social conditions, he leaves us no alternative. Not the injustice of the world, but the unjust God, is eliminated. To re-endow the world with the moral meaning it has now lost, it is left to man himself to rectify the injustice, if he can.

[30] Sufism and Hassidism are good examples of a more optimistic imma-nentism, cf. G. Scholem, "Mysticism and Society," *Diogenes*, No. 58, Summer 1967.

[31] For the concept of 'inheritance' after the expected demise of authority in the colonial context, cf. J. P. Nettl and R. Robertson, *International Systems and the Modernisation of Societies: The Formation of National Goals and Attitudes*, London, Faber and Faber, 1968, Pt. II.

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There are two kinds of objection which could be raised against the picture drawn above of this transformation in religious thinking. One can point to the recent concern with Angst, absurdity and transience in drama as well as theology, and one can hold up the uses of technology for acknowledged 'evil,' as in Auschwitz.

We can dispose of the first objection by contrasting the typically modern consciousness with that of the so-called 'optimists' of the eighteenth century, the followers of Leibniz. The position of the latter was based on Pope's declaration: "to reason well is to submit."[32] As Lovejoy pointed out, these philosophers were actually intellectual pessimists, for they saw evil as an inevitable and permanent feature of any conceivable universe; the perfect whole is necessarily composed of imperfect particulars.[33] (As Voltaire put it in his *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*:

> "*Vous composerez dans ce chaos fatal*
> *Des malheurs de chaque être un bonheur général.*")

The modern existentialist theology, on the contrary, takes man's situation as its starting-point and shuns transcendence, thereby implying an essential affirmation of human potentialities. Man's malaise is not ordained, it does not contribute to a 'higher harmony.' Rather it is seen as a threat to his dignity, an insult to human pain, an external context of absurdity for which man bears little responsibility. This democratic type of Gnosticism is anthropocentric; with Voltaire, it says that we *are* more precious in God's eyes than the animals who devour us, even if we do not seem to be.[34] The modern consciousness is torn between the desire to ensure that the universe has a moral meaning, and the inability to conceive of it in terms that will safeguard the new dignity of humanity. The Kierkegaardian moral pessimism arises from the acceptance of social and intellectual optimism.

[32] A. Pope, *Essay on Man,* cited in J. Lively, *op. cit.*

[33] A. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being,* Harper Torchboock, 1960, pp. 209-211.

[34] Cf. L. Crocker, *The Age of Crisis*, John Hopkins Press, 1959, pp. 60-5; also P. Gay, *The Party of Humanity*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964, pp. 117-26.

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The second problem has no clearcut answer. Auschwitz, despite its lack of theological as opposed to moral and political impact, has come to evoke an ultimate limit. For most men, it is not simply a 'terrible' mistake of the modernisation process; it cannot simply be corrected, it is not enough to avoid it in future, even if that is all one can do in practice. It still conjures up an image of 'evil' even if the language used avoids a religious reference. One may explain this as a thought and linguistic 'lag.' Alternatively, it can be seen as a reaction to the dissolution of ethics into psychology, a search for a new immanentist basis for morality, and a belated recognition of the truth of Ivan's warning, "If God does not exist, all is permitted."

However one views this problem, there is no doubt about the overall sociological trend. Henceforth all conflicts are transposed onto a new plane with a different set of antitheses—man and society, humanity and absurdity, etc. The sociological achievement of ethical radicalism in the West was the breaking down of the unified transcendental frame of reference, in the new social conditions, and its replacement by multiple, immanent and anthropocentric images. That most prized product of religion, its fusion of ethics with theology, turned on its progenitor and hastened the religious disaffection which other social and political conditions had prepared.[35] The 'problem of meaning' had called forth the highest religious conceptions; it now proved to be its ultimate stumbling-block. For what was initially fought out in urbane anguish in the salons and pamphlets of the philosophes, became with Karamazov the diffused cry of all the emancipated of the nineteenth century revolutions: salvation *in toto*, for all or none.

[35] It should be clear that we have not put forward a monocausal argument, but only attempted to trace one set of relationships and their impact on traditional cosmic images. Humanist optimism was not the only 'cause' of the disintegration of the latter, only a necessary condition; just as the scientific and technological revolution were not the only factors contributing to the new emphasis on human dignity, although a strong case could be made for their decisive importance. In this respect it is the application of science to social institutions, such as the bureaucratic state, which is crucial. Ancient Greece provides an interesting example of the muted consequences of its limited diffusion.

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