

Chapter 7

The Meaning of Self-Government

Sweeping assumptions were made by the men who founded the American Republic. They held some "truths to be self-evident," also asserting in the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

As the era of Science has succeeded that of Faith, these "self-evident truths" have been increasingly questioned. Many have demonstrated, in action if not in words, that they do not regard all men as having a fundamental claim to equality. And while there has been increasing lip service to the doctrine of Natural Rights, we demonstrate in many ways that such rights are not regarded as "unalienable." Indeed it is argued with increasing vigor that the individual has *no* rights that cannot properly be alienated by the State.

Of course the founders of the Republic were not all as idealistic and personally disinterested as is often suggested. The Declaration of Independence, in particular, was as much a propagandist as a philosophical document. Its signers subordinated complete sincerity to their primary purpose of justifying a particular course of action. Among those who sponsored the assertion that "all men are created equal" were some who indorsed the practice of human slavery. It suited their convenience to define liberty as an

“unalienable Right,” even though they were personally opposed to dissemination of its blessings among many of their fellow creatures.

But such individual hypocrisy did not minimize the value of the Declaration as an assertion of principle. Its essential value was not as a statement of the way things were, but rather as a proclamation of the way things should be. The actual, as opposed to the ideal, is full of inconsistencies. The importance of the Puritan attitude, so deeply rooted in the fiber of American life, lies in its assumption that it *is* practical “to grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire.” The skepticism and defeatism of the Orient, so alluringly portrayed in Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the Rubaiyat, is wholly alien to the main stream of American thought. The costs of revolution, of civil war, of world-wide combat against alien tyrannies, have never disheartened Americans. So far as our people give any consideration to the “scheme of things” they still on the whole believe that it is possible to “re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire.” It can’t be done—but here it is!

This national characteristic, so stimulating to idealists, so exasperating to skeptics, is of course essentially an expression of faith. And very noteworthy is the fact that this underlying faith has not yet, in the United States, really been undermined by the advance of science. On the contrary, the endeavor has been to harness science to the service of faith. Obviously that faith is frequently crude in its conception and materialistic in its application. But it is still faith—still an essentially religious conviction that Man, for all his inner failings and in spite of all the outer handicaps, remains the master of his destiny.

Blunders and myopia and consequent disillusionment spot almost every page of American history since July 4, 1776. But now, as then, the average American continues to respond to the belief that there really are natural rights and: “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

II

Without equivocation, the Declaration of Independence maintains that the purpose of government, as an institution, is "to secure" certain "unalienable Rights." Some of the less restrained advocates of "free enterprise"—in the narrow commercial sense of the term—would do well to remember that fact. The "American way"—if that means policy sanctioned by tradition and justified by solemn pronouncement of the Founding Fathers—does not preclude governmental intervention in private affairs. On the contrary, it justifies such intervention, since the basic purpose of government is said to be "to secure these rights."

But Thomas Jefferson, as the chief author of the Declaration, was well aware of the tendency of government to destroy natural rights under the pretext, or with the honest intention, of securing them. Even without this perception it would have been logically impossible for the signers of the Declaration to deify the State as such, in a document primarily designed to justify American rebellion against the British State. So contemporary political necessity combined nicely with permanent political philosophy in the passage of the Declaration that immediately follows the statement on the purpose of government. This passage asserts, as another "self-evident truth":

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The supreme value of that assertion lies in its classification of government as a controlled institution, entitled to continue in a particular form only so long as that form is satisfactory to those who are governed. The principle laid down makes it improper to regard any political administration with reverence. This principle makes it an actual civic duty—not just a mischievous pleasure—for the citizen to assume a critical attitude toward his government;

local, state or national. The American political tradition holds that not merely a particular administration, but also the whole political system—the “Form of Government”—is there on sufferance. “It is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it”; preferably to alter by orderly election, but if necessary to abolish by violent revolution. The power in the people is only provisionally delegated to officers of State.

Such a philosophy could easily produce intolerable political instability. And it is significant that the American Communist Party has seized on this endorsement of revolution as a justification for its “Americanism.” As Earl Browder observed when national chairman of the Party (with that lack of subtlety which had so much to do with his fall from grace) “American Communists have long been . . . reviving the study of American history in the light of today’s problems.” But Mr. Browder’s underlying purpose was a little too obvious in his suggestion that Thomas Jefferson was a Communist; that “the Communist Party has its place in the great American tradition” and that Americans should be eternally grateful for “this revival of the American tradition by the Communists.”¹

The American tradition is of course completely opposed to authoritarian government, whether sponsored from the Left or from the Right. The theory of an elite governing class has had profoundly different superficial characteristics in Great Britain on the one hand and in Russia on the other. The Victorian belief in government by a titled aristocracy is seemingly far removed from the Communist principle that a handful of tyrants are entitled to dictate in the name of the proletariat. But from the American viewpoint both are based on the same underlying fallacy. Both assume that political office is something sacrosanct and that those who wield the power of government are for that reason alone worthy of respect. The American conviction is that the “Safety and Happiness” of the governed takes precedence over every governmental prerogative and that deference is not necessarily owing to those temporarily in a position of political command.

¹ Earl Browder, *Victory—and After*, pp. 94, 95, 101.

In Jefferson's words: "When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property."²

III

Between the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, and the practices established by the formulation of the Constitution, there was a space of time and a development of political thinking.

The doctrine that men are important in themselves, and that government is subject to overthrow if it controverts their happiness, was in accord with revolutionary conviction. But after twelve difficult years, of war and virtual anarchy, most Americans became convinced that a national government was both necessary and desirable. Even so, in the establishment of that government the greatest care was taken to insure both the individual citizen and the "sovereign states" against complete subordination to central political authority.

As every student of the Constitutional Convention knows, it was a painfully difficult task to bridge the gap between the popular insistence on responsive local government and the simultaneous necessity for a stable general government. On this issue the convention more than once came near to breaking up. Indeed it is doubtful whether it could have held together without the patient and luminous guidance continually exerted by James Madison. The issue was clarified for all the delegates when Madison said, during the critical discussion on July 17, 1787:

The necessity of a General Government proceeds from the propensity of the States to pursue their particular interests, in opposition to the general interest. This propensity will continue to disturb the system unless effectually controlled. Nothing short of a negative on their laws will control it.

But no constitutional device could alone have reconciled the particular and the general interest. The achievement of this synthesis was really more a matter of national character than of

² Quoted in Rayner, *Life of Jefferson*, p. 356.

governmental design. It was possible only for a people who had been trained, and who had trained themselves, in the virtue of self-government. Without that training it would have been impossible to harmonize the philosophic assumptions of the Declaration of Independence with the practical controls of the federal Constitution.

It has been emphasized that the American Revolution was the third of its kind to be attempted by liberty-loving Englishmen over a period of a century and a half. The English Civil War established the desirability of representative government, as opposed to that of "divine right" monarchy, even though the Puritans were too politically inexperienced, too divided by faction, and often too intolerant to consolidate the gains they had won. The bloodless revolution of 1689 again uprooted the growth of royal dictatorship and confirmed Parliamentary supremacy. By developing the mechanism of party it also made representative government workable in a manner impossible until men had learned to associate their individual political convictions with a continuing organization. The third of this sequence of revolutions was fought out on American soil. Again it was necessary to extirpate—this time completely—the pretensions of the Crown. Again it was necessary to fight for the principle of representative government. But at the third attempt an enduring triumph for the principle of self-government could be narrowly achieved—because in the New World men had learned how to govern themselves.

This was not because Americans were, or are, a superior breed of men. From the beginning the people of this country have, as a generality, lacked the polish, the flavor, the intellectual subtlety—what may broadly be called the culture—characteristic of a minority in older nations. But in compensation Americans as a whole have possessed, more strongly than any people stratified by class or caste, a historically unusual ability to govern themselves. The outward conditions of American life certainly helped to develop this ability. But it has also been greatly strengthened by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which rooted firmly in the American colonies during their formative years.

IV

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was accurately, if contemptuously, described by Thomas Hobbes when this seventeenth century advocate of political absolutism said of the early Quakers, that "every boy or wench thought he spoke with God Almighty."

It is precisely this sense of continuing communion with God that has given the Society of Friends a spiritual strength wholly out of proportion to its numerically trivial membership.³ With absolute conviction George Fox maintained that the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is permeative. "Now the Lord God opened to me by his invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all."⁴

The central core of the Quaker faith lies in the belief that this revelation is immanent; that it can come to the individual independent of priest or Scripture; that its coming is an inward experience that cannot fail to have profound effect on personal conduct. As Fox goes on to say in his *Journal*: "These things I did not see by the help of man, nor by the letter, though they are written in the letter, but I saw them in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by his immediate Spirit and power, as did the holy men of God, by whom the Holy Scriptures were written." These things are, indeed, "written in the letter," never more beautifully than in the passage that says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."⁵

But the issue that above all others split the Puritan movement of the seventeenth century was whether the Spirit and the Word can properly be separated. Can the believer be directly inspired by God, as the Quakers and other Separatists maintained, or is revelation possible only through the scriptural word of the Apostles, as the main body of Puritanism asserted?

Today this issue may seem somewhat rarified, partaking of the

³ About 110,000 in the United States; 40,000 in the British Isles; under 200,000 throughout the world.

⁴ *Journal* (1901 edition), Vol. I, p. 34.

⁵ Revelation 3:20.

cloister rather than the forum, lacking in applicability to the problems of a world jeopardized by the atomic bomb. Reserving judgment on that viewpoint, it must nevertheless be emphasized that the Puritan Revolution in England failed because those who made it split over theological differences. Three centuries ago theology was politics and politics was theology. That fact is worthy of our closest attention, because of the many indications that the troubles of our own time are rooted in a moral decay that cannot be countered either by mechanistic devices or by surrender to irreligious absolutism.

If one says, with more conviction than a parrot, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," what does this mean? Trinitarian doctrine explains that it is necessary to believe in God the Father as the creative power; in God the Son as the redemptive power, and in God the Holy Ghost, or Spirit, as the sanctifying power. Many deeply religious thinkers have concluded that the really distinguishing feature of Christianity is the conception of God as Spirit.⁶ Certainly this conception is ingrained in American political thinking.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence proclaimed their "firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence." The continuity of faith is shown in the not wholly perfunctory practice of opening every meeting of both Houses of the federal legislature with a prayer. It is still true, as noted by de Tocqueville, that: "Religion in America . . . must be regarded as the first of their political institutions."

These institutions properly leave it to Society to thrash out such dogmatic differences as those that separate the trinitarian and the unitarian. But in this country care has been taken to insure that he who believes in the Holy Spirit shall not be regarded as a nonconformist. For those receptive to this belief, the turn from darkness to light becomes very largely a matter of personal choice; a matter of self-government. Because self-government can bring a spiritual, as well as a political, rebirth it seems probable that, with increasing national complexities, increasing numbers of

⁶ Cf. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*.

Americans will seek to make this turn. It is at hand for every man, at any time.

Science has certainly weakened the anthropomorphic conception of God. Science has probed the mysteries of matter and energy so deeply as to make it seem that the nature of the Creator can best be defined as coldly abstract thought, most readily comprehended by a mathematical mind.⁷

Belief in the authority of Jesus, as the son of God, has also been weakened, not so much by scientific as by political development. However much we may dislike, or hesitate, to admit the deification of the Nation-State, acknowledgment of the growth of this idolatry is ineluctable for the courageous mind. The power of the State could not have been so tragically exalted if so many men, following the example of Peter, had not first denied Christ, saying in effect: "I know him not."

But belief in the Holy Spirit has not and cannot be lessened, unless Man is willing to reduce himself to the level of the brute. For the Holy Spirit is only a somewhat exalted synonym for the moral sense, in which even the atheist takes pride as he paradoxically denies the Authority from which it comes. While Right and Wrong may be variable in Space and Time, they are always antipodal at any given place and moment. That much we know, even without benefit of clergy. We know it, and knowing are able to live on a more inspired level than that of the wild animals—because of the Holy Spirit and for no other reason.

God may be denied, and Christ may be denied, but to deny the Spirit is to dissolve Society and to re-establish a system of thinly disguised slavery in its place. No human authority could prevent this outcome, for the more absolute the political dictatorship attempted, the less the field of sovereignty reserved for moral law. And when that law is completely repealed all voluntary cooperation, and therefore all human accomplishment beyond the scope of slavery, becomes impossible.

It follows that repudiation of God the Father, and God the Son, can only serve to emphasize the importance of God the Spirit.

⁷ Cf. Sir James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, Ch. V.

We can sidestep creation and we can refuse redemption. But sanctification we cannot deny, for to do so is suicide of the soul.

V

The divergencies in Puritanism must not deceive us as to the unity of its central core. Puritanism was "a determined and varied effort to erect the holy community and to meet, with different degrees of compromise and adjustment, the problem of its conflict with the world."⁸

This effort failed in England, where external opposition to the entire movement was strong and where internal unity was destroyed in the day of victory by dogmatic differences. But in America the Puritan revolution succeeded, partly because the movement was stronger and favored by isolation from European traditions; partly because American political leadership was wise enough to keep any single sectarian viewpoint from gaining the upper hand. There is nothing haphazard in the wording of the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

This provision was not inserted because the framers of the Constitution regarded the practice of religion as superfluous, but because they knew it to be essential. George Washington was merely stating the general conviction of his fellow-citizens when in his Farewell Address to them he said:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Church and State were separated in this country not to diminish but to augment the power of religious practice. Here was a tremendous power that the American State was *not* allowed to arrogate to itself. On the contrary, it was believed that sectarian

⁸ A. S. P. Woodhouse (Ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty*, Introduction, p. 37.

competition would continue to develop moral self-reliance, and with it that capacity for self-government on which, as Madison said, we "rest all our political experiments."

The essence of spiritual power is found in personal conviction and conviction is strengthened by freedom of choice. The men who fashioned the Republic regarded monopoly of every kind as evil. They therefore sought to avert this evil in every field of social action—political, economic, educational, and religious. They realized, furthermore, that an evil is most dangerous when it can plausibly be portrayed as good. The monopoly of an established church encroaches most insidiously on freedom of choice because the trespass seems to have sanctification. For that reason disestablishment, though implicit in the Constitution as adopted in 1787, was also specified in the clearest possible language in the first article of the Bill of Rights.

Disestablishment was thus a vital part of the procedure insuring that the American Revolution would be successful where its predecessors in England had failed. In his later years this was constantly emphasized by Thomas Jefferson, whose fight against privilege for any particular church lies at the bottom of the foolish charge that he was irreligious. "While the English people had to accept some of the inheritance of the past," wrote Jefferson, "our Revolution commenced on more favorable ground. It presented us an album on which we were free to write what we pleased."⁹ Jefferson's insistence on disestablishment was unquestionably influenced by Locke's doctrine of civil rights, but he concluded that Locke did not go far enough. The deeper reliance placed by Jefferson on natural rights is blazoned in the very text of the "Act for Establishing Religious Freedom," adopted by the Virginia Assembly under his guidance in 1786. This declares "that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind; and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present, or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right."

⁹ Letter to Major Cartwright. Quoted by Gilbert Chinard in *The commonplace Book of Thomas Jefferson*, Introduction, p. 61. See also Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the Virginian*, Ch. XX.

Separation of Church and State solved the problem that had proved fatal to the Puritan Revolution in England. Americans could adhere to a trinitarian or a unitarian creed, according to their own individual conviction. They could maintain with the Presbyterians that the Holy Spirit operates through Scripture, or they could follow the Quaker belief that the Spirit of God is implanted in every man, including heathen and sinners. Such differences of opinion, if held sincerely and with mutual respect, were deemed to be helpful rather than harmful to religious faith.

There was, however, a chink in the armor of this doctrine of tolerance. The tendency of man to place small value on the things for which he does not have to struggle has been the Achilles' heel. There is much basis for the contention that freedom of religion is a natural right. There is also basis for the contention that a natural right, like one prescribed by civil law, evaporates if it is never asserted. But who can maintain a natural right, and how?

VI

A natural right can be asserted but cannot be maintained by act of government. It is within the province of arbitrary government to deny that there are *any* natural rights, or to destroy those—such as the right to life—that seem most undeniable. It is not within the power of the State either to create or to enforce a single right that seems to come to us from nature. Those rights are the work of God, however we may define Him. Their assertion is the work of something within the soul, or self, of the individual possessor. That something is the spirit of liberty.

The assertion of one's own right, however, is always likely to involve encroachment upon the right of another. The lives of men are inextricably intermingled, and further complicated by problems of sex relationships. Even the anchorite cannot liberate himself from the world without affecting the hopes and happiness and health of others, as Charles Reade pointed out so poignantly in his great story of *The Cloister and the Hearth*. So there must be some balance wheel, which the State cannot provide, to see that liberty is secured, not only for oneself but for one's neighbor.

The State alone can never provide this balance, no matter how much it emphasizes the general welfare as the objective of its government. For the State, though more powerful than the most ruthless individual or corporation, can protect the rights of some only by infringing upon the rights of others. Since all the power of the State is derived from Society, it follows that the more one group is privileged, the more the rest are penalized. No matter how evenly the balance is held, in the ceaseless quest for justice, a governmental service to one group in the community is sure to be discriminatory. When the State restricts imports in behalf of domestic manufacturers, the agricultural element pays higher prices for its tools of production. When the farmers in turn obtain a subsidy from the State, the wage earner finds that his food costs more as a result. When the State moves to protect wage earners, through various forms of what is dubiously called "insurance," the manufacturers find that the costs are largely imposed on them.

These are simple economic illustrations of the fact that in helping one interest in a complex Society the State necessarily tends to injure other interests. But the vicious circle is so pervasive that it actually represents a law. The State cannot possibly grant privilege to some without at least tacitly depriving others. Even if titles of nobility are awarded only for truly distinguished service, nevertheless there is discrimination against those whose faithful labor does not attract the royal attention. Even if a Church is given pre-eminence for the loftiest reasons, yet those who conscientiously dissent from its particular ritual are placed in an invidious position as "nonconformist." Even when justice is dispensed with the most scrupulous care, the exaction of due punishment will work a form of injustice on those near and dear to a criminal whose personal guilt is undeniable.

There is that within Man which is forever aspiring to a better way of life. And it is apparent, though perhaps insufficiently remarked, that this ambition for improvement is social as well as individual. Many who are really not interested in personal gain are nevertheless sincerely anxious to see the condition of others advanced. It is not at all unusual for people to spend more truly sacrificial effort on a general cause than they would think of

devoting to their own purification. This social aspiration, which cannot be suppressed and should be guided rather than discouraged, is behind the pathetic belief that civil government, if sufficiently strengthened and enlarged, can somehow vastly improve the lot of mankind.

The tragic fallacy in this illusion is clear. Encroachment on the rights of others is not prevented by withdrawing the power to encroach from individual hands and vesting it in government bureaus. What happens, under the fancied panacea of socialism, is merely that the exercise of power becomes more impersonal, more arbitrary, more inhuman and therefore inevitably more ruthless. This soon becomes apparent, but from the original false diagnosis it is then reasoned that the trouble lies in failure to grant *sufficient* power to the State. So the tendency, especially where democratic processes are wholly unchecked, is to move down the blind alley with increasing speed. When the completely authoritative State is achieved there comes realization that totalitarian government and human liberty are incompatible. But it is then too late.

Clearly the remedy lies in better appreciation of the simple fact that no individual right can be justified without acceptance of an equal and balancing individual responsibility. Most people realize this instinctively, but equally instinctive is the unwillingness to draw appropriate conclusions. The exercise of a right is always more pleasurable than the acceptance of a responsibility. And thus arises the truly fatal tendency to claim the right as an individual while passing the inseparable responsibility over to officialdom.

The men who framed the American republic saw this dilemma with remarkable clarity. They did not foresee that their posterity would be less perceptive. They did not realize that the very perfection of their work for self-government would lessen appreciation of the importance of self-government. They did not anticipate decay of the spiritual element which alone gives full understanding of the beautiful political mechanism that they built. No mechanism can be expected to operate successfully for very long, unless the operators understand its nature.

VII

So reason alone compels us to conclude that religious observance is not just a perfunctory matter for Americans. It is not a superfluous organ, a sort of vermiform appendix in the body politic, which can be removed without affecting the remaining parts.

But religious observance will be largely the passive action of an observer, lacking in the rich contribution of a participant, unless something more than the routine of a formal ritual is involved. Merely to sit through a church service means little. It may be called the spiritual counterpart of casting a ballot on election day. Neither action fulfills its true importance in the field of government if it is performed as a mere convention. There must be active political interest to make the ballot significant in the field of representative government. There must be vital religious interest to make church attendance significant in the field of self-government.

Every executive is painfully familiar with the type of employee who is reasonably regular in punching a time clock, who observes the requisite working hours, who goes through the motions of participating in an enterprise, but who is nevertheless wholly uninterested in his or her work. People of that sort load the payroll of every commercial undertaking and if their pay is negligible their value to the operation is even more so. Such time-servers are inert themselves and only the greater inertia of the organization, or arbitrary regulations forced on its management, secures their employment.

The larger the enterprise, and the more complicated its character, the higher the proportion of its employees who are likely to be mere "job-holders." Size adds an additional stultification by making it difficult for the individual to sense the significance, if any, of what he is doing. This frustrating tendency comes to a climax in what is grandiloquently called "government service." It provides little or no competition to disturb natural inertia and in government there is also a definite short-range political advantage to the establishment of superfluous, duplicating, and sometimes positively harmful jobs.

A somewhat similar frustration is apparent when we turn to a consideration of the duties of citizenship. Here there are many who do not even take the trouble to make conventional observance, for it is much easier to drift along without voting than it is to survive without working. The perfunctory attitude, however, is pronounced even among those who go through the motions at the polls. It is explained that the candidates are machine-picked and that a choice between them is largely meaningless. But when this charge is justified it really means that the electorate has become too indifferent to interest itself in, and to improve, the procedures by which opposing candidates were selected.

With the decline of spiritual vitality, a great deal of religious observance has also sunk to this same level of purely mechanical performance. In many cases there is not much conviction behind either the selection of a church, or attendance after the choice is made. And, increasingly, many Americans do not bother to join or participate in the work of *any* church. Often these absentees are the same people who do not bother to vote. They would not bother to work if "the government" could be prevailed upon to keep them provided with ham and eggs, a heated apartment, comic strips, and a plug-in radio—television preferred.

This sort of person—negative in his religion, his citizenship, his work, and even in his taste for entertainment—is the mass man who swarms in the great cities that characterize the machine age. By the sheer weight of indifference the mass mind must, in time, drag down and destroy any system of government that depends on the sense of individual responsibility for its successful operation. The mass mind is allergic to responsibility, but is insistent on rights that have no reality when they are divorced from responsibility. Always there have been men whose dominant aim has been to get more from the common pot than they contribute to it. But this failure of self-government has become more dangerous socially with the triumph of representative government. For this system tends to vest authority in those who will conform automatically to the level of the mass.

The trouble is far too deep-rooted to yield to any panacea, or to permit an indictment leveled at one particular point in its de-

velopment. If the mass mind is a concomitant of the assembly line, then those who devised the assembly line certainly have some responsibility for its shortcomings. It is not how the mass mind was produced, however, but how it is to be enlightened, that is the present problem. Certainly there is no hope in a political doctrine suggesting that because many have failed to meet personal responsibility, all should be made personally irresponsible. Yet this is precisely what has come to be widely advocated for the Republic.

Americans should feel indebted to the Communists, the Fascists, and the Nazis for having so clearly shown, by parallel demonstrations, just where the various avenues of socialism eventually lead. In each case, with only minor variations, it is assumed that the individual is incapable of self-government, with consequent measures designed to keep him so. Since the mass man fears personal responsibility, his irresponsibility is encouraged. Then all individuals who dare to carry social responsibility are sweepingly denounced in such opprobrious generalities as "economic royalists" or "capitalistic exploiters." In this manner the groundwork is laid for governmental dictatorship to take over.

The reasoning is based on good psychology and it is noteworthy that Communists and National Socialists have often used parallel phraseology to express their parallel thought. Thus the Theses of the Communist International, as adopted in Moscow during the summer of 1920, proclaimed that:

The preparation of the dictatorship of the proletariat demands . . . the replacing of the old leaders by Communists in all kinds of proletarian organizations, not only political, but economic, co-operative, educational, etc., . . . In every organization . . . groups or nuclei of Communists . . . must systematically train themselves, the party, the class and the masses by such multiform work.¹⁰

Whether or not Hitler had read this, when four years later he wrote *Mein Kampf*, he certainly had the same idea of exploiting the mass mind in behalf of the *Fuehrer Prinzip*. "One thing we must get through our heads," Hitler told his fellow Nazis:

¹⁰ *Blueprint for World Conquest*, p. 49-52.

If a certain total of a peoples' energy and vigor seems to be concentrated on one goal, and thus is definitely removed from the inertia of the broad masses, these few per cent rise to be overlords of all. World history is made by minorities, if this numerical minority embodies a majority of will and determination.¹¹

VIII

American political theory also asserts that progress in every line of endeavor comes from the effort of that small minority of men who are alert, intelligent, determined, and self-sacrificial in their desire to raise mankind in the scale of animal life. The value of minority opinion is recognized in the provisions of the Constitution designed to protect minorities—of every kind. But there is an antipodean difference in the American and the totalitarian attitude toward minorities. The American theory is that every man has within him the potential to make a significant contribution of some kind to human welfare. Therefore every minority, which is usually a grouping of individuals connected by some common belief, must be protected against the ever possible tyranny of mass opinion. The minority is not given this protection because it is making a significant contribution, but because it is always possible that it may do so. Thus the promise of tomorrow in every line of endeavor is kept bright in America.

Totalitarianism, whether Communist, Fascist, or Nazi, has no faith in the virtues of minorities as such. The characteristic of this system is that it exalts one single minority, and seeks to subjugate all others to the will of that unified group. This group may claim to speak for national welfare, like the Italian Fascists; for racial welfare, like the German Nazis; for proletarian welfare, like the Russian Communists. But these apparent differences are only variations on a single theme. In each case a minority that regards itself as elite seeks not merely to dominate other minorities, but also to bind the entire population to its will. This minority sincerely believes that it has found the formula of salvation. All that is necessary is to subject everybody to that formula. The

¹¹ *Mein Kampf* (Stackpole Edition), p. 387.

fundamental questions have all been answered—by Mussolini, Hitler, Karl Marx, or somebody—and henceforth mankind need only follow the leader. Disagreement with the party line is heresy. Thus the maximum promise of tomorrow in a totalitarian State is some material improvement.

Stated this way, the philosophical basis of totalitarian doctrine is seen to be puerile. But the doctrine has made, and continues to make, such headway that one must analyze the reasons for its success. They are not far to seek.

In the first place we can readily see that the malaise is universal. America, for all its relative political health, has plenty of native Nazis who firmly believe in the superiority of their particular racial group. We have our native Fascists, who blandly identify the national interest with their personal advantage. We have our native Communists, easier to identify because they more openly proclaim their disloyalty to American institutions. In using these labels it is, of course, important to concentrate on their essential meanings, and not to be confused by emotional overtones. Thus a Zionist minority can be fundamentally racial in its thinking, even as it denounces the Nazi form of racism. Similarly, a business group, seeking to establish a monopoly, may condemn Italian Fascism even though its techniques are identical with those that Mussolini advocated.

We have native Fascists, Nazis, and Communists primarily because it has now become customary for people to place their whole faith in material well-being. That is the low common denominator making surface differences within the totalitarian species a relatively secondary matter. And insistence upon material well-being, divorced from any sense of personal responsibility, has become a dominant American characteristic. If materialism continues to be increasingly emphasized, we may and should expect our native totalitarians to increase in number. There is justification in the Communist claim that free enterprise must, in the long run, be suicidal. If free enterprise has only a materialistic meaning, then it is doomed.

For the murder of free enterprise, however, two antecedent preparations are necessary. The State must be exalted at the ex-

pense of the individual and there must be an increase in religious indifference. The procedure in exalting the State is steadily to augment its physical power at the expense of Society. The more that power can be concentrated, the more perfect the State becomes as an instrumentality of suppression in the hands of those who believe in suppression. Here is the point at which the real liberal and the amiable Socialist divide. The analytical liberal realizes that the Welfare State is the agency through which totalitarianism takes over. The kind-hearted Socialist sees only the humanitarian possibilities of State control—until the thoroughgoing Marxist tells him where to get off.

But more than possession of the machinery of physical power is necessary for a totalitarian triumph. It is not enough to exalt the State. It is also essential to debase the individual. To accomplish this his religious instincts must be weakened, for it is these instincts that alone give substance to the spirit of liberty. Politicians in whom the religious element is lacking are frequently glib in demanding that liberty be provided by government. Liberty, however, cannot be manufactured, packaged, and distributed—not even by nationalized industries. Liberty is not a commodity, but a quality. Only one form of government can nurture liberty, and that is personal self-government.

Here is the explanation of the political importance of Christianity. That religion demands consistent subordination of self to the welfare of others. In so doing it emphasizes the superiority of Divine Authority to "the insolence of office"; the importance of self-government as opposed to external regimentation. Admittedly the standards of Christianity are painfully exacting for human nature. The fact that they are so exacting is itself part of the evidence of the divinity of Christ, for no mortal can be expected never to transgress his teachings. Allowance for this is made by the incorporation of mercy, forgiveness, and redemption in the Christian system.

Precisely because Christianity emphasizes self-government, every advocate of totalitarianism is either openly or tacitly anti-Christian. But a frontal attack on religious observance is not necessary from the totalitarian viewpoint. The growing emphasis on

materialism itself weakens Christianity. Man cannot serve both God and Mammon, and when service to the former is made subordinate, the road of the dictator is made smooth for him in advance. Therefore it is more subtle for the Marxist to emphasize materialism, where he can exploit the sense of justice to strengthen his case, than it is to attack the churches as such.

Both exaltation of the State and destruction of religious faith are necessary to undermine the American system of government, as a preliminary to the coming of dictatorship. But of the two procedures, exaltation of the State is the more emphasized, because it is reasoned from the evidence available that Americans can be expected to abandon their religious faith without much prompting; and of their own free will.

IX

A few months before his death, which took place on August 13, 1946, a very influential English author published a truly tragic confession. The writer was Herbert George Wells and his final essay was entitled *Mind at the End of Its Tether*.

The far-ranging thought of H. G. Wells made a deep impression during the half-century that preceded achievement of the atomic bomb. Both his scientific fantasies and his sociological novels were of more than transient influence. No other scientist could so clearly portray to the average mind the weird developments to be expected from concentrated laboratory research. No other Socialist could describe more winningly the Utopian emancipation anticipated from the breaking down of personal self-restraint, and the substitution of always pleasantly vague governmental controls.

At the close of his remarkable *Outline of History*, written with the hope of bringing some helpful moral out of the catastrophe of World War I, Wells became characteristically lyrical about the future:

History is and must always be no more than an account of beginnings. . . . Life begins perpetually. Gathered together at last under

the leadership of man, the student-teacher of the universe, unified, disciplined, armed with the secret powers of the atom and with knowledge as yet beyond dreaming, Life, for ever dying to be born afresh, for ever young and eager, will presently stand upon this earth as upon a footstool, and stretch out its realm amidst the stars.

Wells will long continue to be an interesting figure, for reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of his imagination and his literary skill. What makes this prolific and stimulating thinker of unusual importance is something that he perhaps never realized. Wells was the great popularizer of positivist philosophy. His apostasy, in this final essay, is therefore indirect affirmation of the vital importance of those difficult abstractions on which the American system of government depends.

The parents who named him Herbert George were a small shopkeeper and a domestic servant, occupations that placed the boy at the very bottom of the curious social pyramid that was Victorian England. Yet Wells' brilliant creative mind brought him, by middle life, world acclaim as well as plenty of honor in his own country. He symbolized a significant change in social outlook. The barriers of class and caste, always resented in America, were also breaking down in England. Here, in the person of H. G. Wells was the triumph of the democratic over the aristocratic principle. But here also in the same person is a solemn warning to those who rest their faith on the assumption that the removal of external barriers to individual advancement is of itself enough.

This popular writer was very definitely lacking in spiritual qualities. Perhaps this attrition was partly due to the effort Wells had to make to raise himself from ignoble obscurity. Certainly his reverence for the progress of science magnified the deficiency. Whatever the reason, the deficiency was there. It is apparent in much that Wells wrote, but nowhere more nakedly than when, in the *Outline of History*, he turned to discuss the rise of Christianity. Here he says: "About Jesus we have to write not theology but history, and our concern is not with the spiritual and theological significance of his life, but with its effects upon the political and everyday life of men."

Wells' pathetic attempt to separate the inseparable—to departmentalize “positive” and “negative” knowledge as in the barren system conceived by Auguste Comte—is characteristic of the fatal fragmentation of our times. In the case of Wells the moral is made plain for all to see because, like Comte, the democratic English author had a well-developed ethical instinct. Often his writing protests injustice. Yet, paradoxically, he never seeks the source of the concept of Justice. “After all,” he writes in *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, “the present writer has no compelling argument to convince the reader that he should not be cruel or mean or cowardly.”

Thus, for lack of a developed sense of spiritual values, Wells at the close of his life was forced by his fine intellect to assert morosely that: “the human story has already come to an end . . . Homo sapiens, as he has been pleased to call himself, is in his present form played out.” Previously he had “liked to think that Man could pull out of his entanglements and start a new creative phase of human living.” But as the shadows closed in on this mind of undoubted genius it could see only “a jaded world devoid of recuperative power.” And most of what he had written to the contrary, Wells bitterly concluded, “may now go down the laboratory sink.”

X

For its deep sincerity, as well as for the underlying moral that it unconsciously points, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* may be expected to survive the oblivion to which H. G. Wells consigns “the greater bulk” of his writing “upon the fundamental nature of life and time.” But our concern is with the vicious circle in which this brilliant mind was caught and to which, at the end, it so tragically succumbed.

That fate, we are now in a position to assert, is the inevitable and foreordained result of trying to separate spiritual significance from “the political and everyday life of men,” as Wells himself tells us he sought to do. Although the tragedy is commonplace it is particularly stark in this case. The legend of Prometheus reminds us that punishment is nicely calculated to the degree of

the offense against the moral law. The ordinary recusant does not suffer as did Wells when his courageous mind reached the end of a tether a little longer than that vouchsafed the average man.

But, in greater or less degree, the same cause produces the same consequence. Therefore self-government can never properly or safely rely on the direction of intelligence alone. And the need for external support becomes the greater when mankind has struggled up to the stage where intelligence is respected for itself. The emancipation brought by democracy, in other words, immediately emphasizes the need for submission to an Authority higher than that which has been displaced.

So we reach the conclusion that self-government is something even more than the only method by which the enjoyment of what we call natural rights can be assured. It is also a continuous, not occasional, act of individual sublimation. Christ explained the formula simply enough to the woman of Samaria, as they talked beside Jacob's well:

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.¹²

Without this spiritual content the greatest intelligence is hopelessly inadequate. With it, even the most humdrum mind will experience satisfactions beyond the purchase of any bank account. And the moral here is a matter of practical precinct politics. Self-government must be spiritually directed in order to be effective. Without effective self-government no political system, no matter how ingeniously designed, can hope to secure life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness, in the deeper sense of those rich words. So the spiritual quality, demanded by the American political system, must be brought back into active production, even though no federal bureau is able to measure the individual output. If, as a people, we have lost the sense of spiritual values, then the very basis of our material values is also gone. When it becomes a matter of consolidating strength to meet a challenge, the foundation of our civic strength must first be re-examined and repaired.

¹² John 4:24.

The abandonment of faith in behalf of undirected reason leads swiftly to a second, and final, apostasy. The mind does come to the end of its limited tether, and then there is nothing but black despair beyond. Then it happens that men forget the meaning of self-government and surrender themselves—willingly or despairingly, according to temperament—to be absorbed into and directed by the totalitarian State.

Against such an outcome, the American Republic stands as mankind's last substantial defense.