

HUMAN MOTIVES AND HISTORY

I

During the past century and a half historians and sociologists have often shown signs of considerable simplicity of mind when assessing the motivating forces behind the men whose deeds they are studying, and those attaining the most flattering notoriety in the intellectual world have been among the simplest. From the early nineteenth century, beginning with the fall of Napoleon, there is a tendency to present the historical disciplines as sciences: the re-creative anecdote is greeted with increasing disdain, and sociology undergoes its act of baptism. The Revolution of 1789 and the epic of imperial France are events of such dimension that it is difficult to associate them with the conscious designs of a few individuals. No longer a muse, Clio becomes a goddess. In *War and Peace* Tolstoi ironically treats historians of the old school who pretend to offer the key to the Revolution “in exposing the deeds and gestures of a few dozen men in one building in the city of Paris.” The French emperor’s gallop into Russia and the stubborn but apparently passive resistance offered by Kutuzov—these are facts in which Tolstoi sees the manifestation of forces far surpassing the play of a few human wills. Tolstoi’s manner in extolling Kutuzov is typical: Kutu-

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zov is not a visionary; he shows no signs of genius, but with humble and patient fervor he turns aside all obstacles which might stifle the voice of popular instinct. Thirty years before Tolstoi, in a letter to his fiancée, Georg Büchner stated the case in another good example of this type of thinking: "I have studied the history of the Revolution. . . . I find in human nature a frightening equality, in the condition of man an ineluctable power conferred at once upon all and upon no one. The individual is but a fleck of foam upon the wave, greatness merely the result of chance, the power of genius a puppet show, a ridiculous struggle against a law of iron." Men are interesting insofar as they are representative. Saint-Simon, mentor of Auguste Comte and father of sociology, declares that the great men of the world merely play the role assigned to them in historical evolution. According to Saint-Simon, the sixteenth century, an age of theology, gave birth to theologian-kings: Charles V and Henry VIII. Because he is a theologian, Henry VIII easily prevails over gallant and witty Francis I. The eighteenth century, a *siècle* of philosophy, "counts but two great names among its sovereigns: Catherine and Frederick the Great, friends of philosophers and patrons of philosophy." Seen in this light, the features of the individual become blurred and shadowy. History is admired instead—history which, often with material of mediocre quality, builds solid edifices. But, faced with the astonishing drama played out by Napoleon himself, Tolstoi merely shrugs his shoulders, while following step by step simple men like Tostopchin or Kutuzov, who are obviously the mere instruments of history. Heine, who went through a Saint-Simonian phase, is amazed that Luther, that rough, gross monk whose brain was clouded by anxiety and superstition, so easily wielded the battering ram that shattered the old medieval world. In the 1830's Auguste Comte foresees a "history without proper names," a definition which is of prime importance in the analysis we are undertaking here. But, a hundred years later, Maxime Leroy, nourished on both Comte and Sainte-Beuve, draws more subtly shaded definitions: history becomes a "sociology containing proper names."

The philosophers and political writers who insured the success of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century were convinced that men, whatever their social status or racial origin, will react quasi-identically in life's essential gestures. Hence the symbolic value of the Freemason's level: Cleopatra's nose will no longer be victoriously inscribed on the register of historical causes; ministers will no longer be chosen in the boudoirs of favorites. With humanity attaining its majority, reason will reign over his-

tory. Mirabeau showed the Constituent Assembly how the history of men was substituted for the history of heroes and brigands. In its infancy humanity created gods and submitted to the will of priests. Adolescent, it followed warriors. Thanks to the enlightenment of its adulthood, it was to devote itself to industry. The French Revolution having fallen on the fields of battle, Hegel and then Marx measure the weaknesses of the Enlightenment: dialectic relieves reason, and new tables of value are designed, giving first place to history. While reason was for the Enlightener the divine flame from which history was set alight, she is for Hegel the fruit of history, carried in her loins. A difficult delivery, and Hegel and Marx were to reproach the Enlightener for having artificially sought to eliminate suffering and trial from history. Social combat is the greatest means of education man knows.

Such a reversal of values leads to serious consequences, but, in the order of preoccupations about which this study revolves, it will at least for some time cause but small eddies. When they view the individual in history, Hegel and Marx, on the one hand, the philosopher of the Enlightenment, on the other, show different reactions. But in both cases man's own traits are blurred in shadow, and both show the same aversion to psychology.

The apparently strange forms which may be assumed by the hero in action scarcely disturb Hegel, who thinks that men must seek self-accomplishment above all, however costly this may be. Action purifies; it burns away the slag which paralyzes the inner life. Seen from another angle, since Hegel finds all human acts responsible before history's tribunal, no serious attack is to be feared by the hero, who remains enchained. And, finally, on the road sketched by Hegel there is less and less pull on the reins of history, for the mind is gradually crystallized in the absolute: the world glides toward a nirvana in which but the voices of a few sages are heard. Marx's scenario is different from Hegel's, but, in one as in the other, history can be said to flatten out men. Class-consciousness, a keystone of Marxism, develops to the point where other intellectual and affective schemes with which the mind used to play are caused to disappear. Modern industry is a cruel school, but it takes a clear place in the proletarian consciousness: it creates resentments leading to battle and assuring victory. Thus, in fact, is explained Friedmann's cry of alarm—his study, "Psychoanalysis and Sociology," in *Diogenes*, No. 14 (Summer, 1956), will be recalled. If class-consciousness may insure victory over certain men, it remains powerless against things. It is possible to be a fortunate and effective soldier in the revolutionary battle, but one is not necessarily the able direc-

tor of a new economy; and the problems of adaptation to the large factory born of economic evolution spring from a social psychology far removed from the Marxian dialectic. In this matter Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Karl Marx here follow the same line: all three consider the industrial experience decisive for the rationalization of the human mind. Equally decisive is the increasing weight in the new state of two social groups heretofore held in subjection: women and the proletariat. Precisely because they remained mute when humanity was cradled by gods or immolated itself for conquerors, these will, in the new world under construction, speak with voices of good sense, with the voice of reason: neither the old religious fevers nor the old war-like fevers will affect these new beings.

II

Historians and sociologists have then been nourished—it matters little here whether this nourishment has been knowingly absorbed or not—on ideologies which restrict the individual in cramped positions. At the same time, it will be noted that, for reasons which might be explained psychologically, the social sciences were from their beginnings ranged against psychology. There is no place for psychology in the positivist Republic. Auguste Comte is mad but firmly resolved to cure himself, by himself, of his madness: admirable, indeed, in this undertaking where mere tenacity is to force the victory. He effects this cure by the invention of sociology: the edifice of knowledge is crowned by a science which will prevent every play of fantasy and forbid cultivation in the interior garden of the mind of flowers too unhealthy or of too intoxicating an aroma. The Saint-Simoniens begged the romantics to join forces with them, convinced that the fervors which consumed the young Lamartine and Hugo would be calmed by initiation into sociology. (Neither Lamartine nor Hugo would listen seriously to the call of the sirens, but to some degree the political action in which they participated was hygienically salutary.) Why did Saint-Simon hurl such anathemas against the jurist, the protestant, the individualist of the eighteenth century? Because these three types of men behave as termites within the social body, and to compromise the equilibrium of societies is to create an open field for neuroses and anguish. Such was sociology before psychoanalysis offered itself as a therapeutic. In a state whose collective respiration is properly regulated, man will be inhibited from wandering to the extreme points of the self. The earliest sociologies, including that of Durkheim, multiplied prohibitions and developed in a

messianic climate. We understand, then, that the founders of sociology were led all unawares to transmute themselves into pontiffs. In the earliest stage of their preoccupations man is invited to employ all the resources of his reason to escape the servitudes imposed on him by a wicked society. In the second stage it is said that the affectivity of this man has been dangerously freed or exacerbated by revolutionary shocks; harmony will be retrieved through great social communion. Saint-Simonianism becomes a religion—a religion founded by Auguste Comte. Marx gave birth to churches whose inquisitors in ever growing numbers severely promulgate dogmas and impose moral regulations.

Complex and even contradictory ideologies and feelings thus animate the philosophers and sociologists who, in the first part of the nineteenth century, attempted to situate man in relation to history. Historical evolution simplified the motive power of man, who, in his actions, will make daily gains in ease and effectiveness, and the social and rational tend to become confused. But from another point of view philosophers and sociologists fear certain divergences and aberrations; man will be disciplined so that his affectivity does not give rein to passions interrupting the spontaneous play of history. Comte makes himself the champion of a history without proper names, a history which shows a quasi-perfect coherence, but he also considers an exceptional mastery necessary for writing such a history. Along this line of thought the fifty-sixth lesson of the *Cours de philosophie positive* is most revealing: Comte describes the *temps deux* of history, the metaphysical state, as a moment in which men behave as destroyers and critics. But he wishes to show that the balance of this negative action remains positive nonetheless, and, the demonstration over, he cannot resist bestowing upon himself a “satisfactory”: “If I had not been there, would humanity have been able to take a clear view of the route on which it is engaged?” The same contradictions are present in Marxism, in which the evolution of the economy determines class-consciousness. But, in order for the proletarian consciousness to flourish in proper conditions, a Marx and Lenin had to come into the world, who, endowed with an extraordinary hope, were not themselves subject to the imperatives of their own class-consciousness. The daily behavior of the average man thus remains under the command of a few supermen.

Obviously, the great makers of ideologies and systems pose questions which cannot be answered without recourse to psychology. But let us leave these intellectual giants and turn back to those historians and sociologists evoked at the beginning of this study, who work in a style more

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scrupulous, less volcanic, less dazzling. This type of historian generally remains on the periphery of the philosophic thought of his time and seldom seeks to make explicit the influences he undergoes. So it is that in our day an ever widening gulf is being created between philosophers who never stop talking about history, without having had any practice in historical work, and historians who wish to remain ignorant of all philosophic verbiage. "We have our feet on the ground," they say, "and we do not care to hear the gods who speak in the clouds." But the retort may be made that the very soil on which they stand is watered by storms let loose by the gods. We will not stress here the characteristics of this gulf. Let it merely be said that, if the historian has remained unmoved by the philosopher and the sociologist who put on sacerdotal robes, he has nonetheless been consciously or unconsciously attracted by the effort of rationalization and psychological simplification which we have just described. Whether it be economic, military, political, or diplomatic history, we are faced with works in which man, surrounded by a machinery which is increasingly complicated, behaves as a modest and rather dull technician. He may no doubt appear timid or presumptuous; he may slow down or clumsily force the speed of the machine in his charge. On the whole he plays his role. And this should scarcely surprise us when we bear in mind that, for Hegel and Marx, humanity poses only problems that it can solve, with the result that, as historical information extends and as unsuspected correspondences between different groups of social phenomena come to light, man takes on the guise of a poor relation on this increasingly scintillating merry-go-round which is history. Notes pile up on our work tables, but the man who disengages himself from them is made of an ever more tasteless dough. The old descriptive terms are not, mind you, disappearing from modern books, but they remain summary and conventional. The courtiers surrounding Louis XV are frivolous, the ministers of Louis-Philippe are rapacious, and so on. The man evoked by the historian is more and more denuded of character.

The explanation of this denudation is aided by two orders of sentiments which are actually contradictory and to which the historian pays no heed. First of all, what a pleasure it is to take revenge on the heroes one puts on the stage! The historian is a peaceful man, a university man whose horizon is relatively limited. With more or less involuntary complaisance, he will diminish the brilliance of the hero who triumphed in the alcove or on the battlefield. A second sentiment more subtle, more profound, and of more formidable consequence: the historian who has himself acted but little

tends to present his personage as an animal of action, a being instinctively led to cut the Gordian knot of history. Contrary to the intellectual who weighs and equivocates, the man who had the good fortune to be chosen by Clio ardently accomplishes his task. However, as one becomes more and more familiar with history, he observes how badly men are adapted to the tasks they undertake. Their education has been generally of a nature least likely to predispose them toward the battles they wage under the conflagration of history. Among the problems they must resolve and the solutions which they are to present, they inject anguish, whimsicalities, and ancient manias which distort the contours of their actions. The revolution of 1789 is the work of "lawyers" who know only Sparta and Rome. These men, full of haughty pride in their efforts to construct the new state on the foundations of nothing but reason, are timorous and retrograde in economic matters. Napoleon is an artilleryman who enjoys his life as a romance but is not interested in cannons. (Not a bit of improvement will be made in the old matériel of Gribeauval.) The new worlds are woven of the oldest of dreams. It may be that history's own secrets are not to be penetrated; but history does, at least, reveal some of the secrets of man.

III

How should we explore the frontier zones where history and psychology meet? A comparison of Jaurès' work on *The Origins of German Socialism* (a thesis presented at the Sorbonne during the 1890's) with Max Weber's studies on the relationships between the Protestant ethic and capitalism will show precisely the orientation of the research whose development we seek. Beginning with identical premises, Jaurès and Weber reach fundamentally different conclusions, the former finding that the reflection begun by Protestantism at the beginning of the sixteenth century leads directly to socialism, the latter believing, on the contrary, that this reflection furnishes the necessary material for constructing the capitalist edifice. In generally similar terms, Jaurès and Weber stress one fact of capital importance: Protestantism blew up the whole world of intercessors available for the Middle Ages between the Creator of the universe and the humblest of the faithful. And Jaurès is delighted by this explosion; the conscience of medieval man was too encumbered with parasitic images, and the disappearance of sacerdotal bodies and intercessors is a victory for reason, which will henceforth be able to function with greater ease. To shorten the distance separating God from the faithful is to work in favor of light.

(Jaurès lets it be understood that this direct tête-à-tête tones down the dangerous features God had assumed in the imaginations of men. Little by little, man is to occupy the place of God.) It is likewise in a spirit of satisfied approval that Jaurès examines the theory of predestination. Jaurès, in fact, reserves his severity for those who, in the metaphysical domain of the religious, center their thought on freedom, for the soul, grown too self-confident, inclines toward softness and inertia. This flabby soul will be an easy prey for priests and princes. The Jesuit who preached so much about freedom effeminized the spirit. In giving a new vigor to the dogma of predestination, Protestantism fashions a grave man who will be aware of precisely those laws which condition the existence and the evolution of societies. Luther's religious dialectic thus serves as preface to the dialectic of Hegel, who in turn announces that of Marx. With no more intercessors, says Weber, the tête-à-tête with God is presented in a frame of frightening simplicity. The images which used to form a screen between God and man having vanished, the soul, site of violent upheavals, will be the more sharply consumed by anguish. At the same time Protestantism has destroyed the monasteries which used to afford refuge to anxious hearts. A lonely, grave, tense man, little given to enjoyment, is this not the very type whom capitalism calls for? A man who accepts boredom, the discipline of long dreary work, a man more likely to economize than to waste. The long, endless throb of the modern spinning machine is the sedative which has calmed the anguish of the Puritan.

To formulate his diagnosis, Jaurès makes a synthesis which is on the whole curious and more clever—unconsciously clever—than solid, in which the Enlightener rubs elbows with the disciple of Hegel. Max Weber attempts to distinguish the different types of temperaments which, in periods of social crisis, elaborate or project such-and-such an ideology or religious scheme. He observes that determinations properly called “psychological” transform the doctrines which are set in motion. The earliest Reformers wanted to lead men back to the sources of the Scriptures, to the purity of primitive Christianity: their preoccupations were hardly economic. But in the long run they were to create the climate which would set the great modern productive concentrations in motion. The Italian states of the Renaissance were materially ready, says Weber, for a grand capitalist movement. Florence had powerful financial equipment at her disposal, but, since Italy continued to bear the Catholic stamp, the capitalist soul was lacking, and the body was unable to come alive. On the other hand, in the earliest colonies founded in North America, the economy is

rough and primitive. The body is extremely thin, almost a phantom, but the Puritan spirit blows intensely and by this fact animates capitalism, which will then develop to a fulness unequaled elsewhere. We do not quite swallow the too systematic thesis of Max Weber, but it is fitting to stress a methodology which, despite its awkwardness, had the incomparable merit of not considering the psychological as necessarily submerged by the social.

We do not really think that in a given situation man has many or varied means at his disposal; we even confess that the outlines of history seem to us simple: a great deal of subtlety is uselessly employed today to explain events which do not need so much of it! We believe, with Proudhon, that history is made in "large pieces." The reader will forgive these remarks of a personal nature, for we should like to parry the criticism of those who would fear that our analyses lead to a sort of amused and skeptical impressionism. But the historian too often forgets, it seems, that the man who seeks to renew himself, to free himself, to escape enslavement or death, is nevertheless able to orient himself in two different directions, as he utilizes the register of history directly or tends rather to explore his own inner depths. It may be said in passing that the conflict between art and revolution is thus explained. The man who frees himself through creating a great literary or musical work, and the one who does so in breaking up the pavements or firing a machine gun remain brothers, at odds with each other, but brothers, rallying round the same ideological or religious sign.

But let us return to the great crisis leading to the Renaissance and the Reformation. Throughout the West men were stifled under the armor forged by the feudal system and the church of Rome, and for some it was a matter of respinning the thread of history, of seeing the culture of antiquity as a wellspring for the eternal youth of man. The passion for continuity manifests itself in Thomas More, in Erasmus, and in Rabelais: ignorance and fear had altered the character of man, to be revived when he would joyously take the measure of his own culture and wisdom. But Luther, in fear and trembling, in the depths of his anguish, holds as nothing at all that which constitutes for a different type of man the real in religion—good works and the sacraments. Luther trembles at the prospect of presenting himself before his Creator, after death, with the ridiculous baggage of a few vigils, fasts, and monastic austerities. But unbearable anguish yields to triumphal appeasement when he finds that salvation lies in faith, in faith alone. Luther explains this appeasement in a revealing image, comparing himself to a pregnant woman who, in happy and confident passivity, per-

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mits the development of the fruit she carries within her. Two different civilizations are to crystallize—one around More's and Erasmus' thought and the other around Luther's. And we know with what strange morbidity, with what absolute disdain for all positive ends. Germany delivered herself, through three centuries of history, of her phantasms and inner monsters.

Man often appears as a product or, to repeat Büchner's expression, as foam upon the wave. But he must not be considered as always borne along by history; man uses history to orchestrate strange personal dreams of troubled audacity. Jean Jacques Rousseau invented romantic situations to explain certain kinds of feelings: confused, uncertain, but powerful, these can be rendered explicit only in the guise of the novel. In the same way some men, in order to live, need the intoxicating effect history provides them—a history whose function is not to inspire but rather to heal. By committing acts of violence and crime, an individual may be delivered in the same fashion as Comte elaborating a sociology. History operates like a psychoanalyst. Naturally, the acts set loose for the cure of a given neurosis have mortal consequences for millions of men—history's course of treatments is costly—and we are far from that rationalization, that simplification, on which history was built during the nineteenth century. It will not be denied that purely social resentments may give to revolutions a cruel turn. But often men who are physically or psychologically ailing, or wounded—the wound resulting more from defects inherent in the human condition than from social injustices—use revolutionary upheaval for revenge, and the limits of cruelty are extended. Let us go further: the very men who leap over the ramp of history, those whom the historian eagerly depicts as animals of action, positive and lucid men, do not always seek to succeed in their undertaking. They are more occupied with the melody they hear within themselves than with the problems they are theoretically expected to solve. They enjoy their defeats, telling themselves perhaps rightly that the conquered great remain with particular intensity in the memory of mankind. Trotsky lived with the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* under his pillow. Did he truly wish to open new paths to revolution? Or did he not rather wish to offer dreams exaggerated in subtlety to certain disappointed proletarian elements? Trotsky is less gifted than Napoleon for deciding the swing of the pendulum. And Hitler, did he really want to erect a new empire? May he not rather have wished to live a Wagnerian drama, a *Götterdämmerung*?

It may seem surprising that the conception of history without proper

names did not collapse with the Battle of Stalingrad. The two great armies facing each other are commanded by the very type of man—be he Hitler or Stalin—whose disappearance had been predicted by the Enlightener. Of course, Hitler, not without reason, considered himself a representative man. When he was struggling for power, his adversaries, in an attempt to belittle him with ridicule, treated him as a drummer-boy, from which evolved a sort of German pun: *Hitler trommler*. Hitler would reply: “Yes, a drum—the drum on which German misery resounds.” Let us add that history is full of collective neuroses and that social groups, like individuals, may yearn more or less consciously for suffering, Hitler’s morbidity being linked to that of Germany itself. It is no less true that the man who offered himself as the healer of Germany and creator of a new Reich destined to last a thousand years was abnormal. A Stalin in whom reside the hopes of the proletariat, of that proletariat which was supposed to simplify the scenario of history, is also abnormal. Stalin is the great tyrant who pursues a solitary dream and tolerates no one around him but terrorized slaves. He is tripped up and falls into absurd decisions which lead to the destruction in combat, with no appreciable results, of entire divisions. He is the anti-Kutuzov, and did Tolstoi ever imagine the *War and Peace* of the 1940’s? In sum, social forces are incarnate in men who have a style, and history is made of this stylization. Napoleon is in large measure the product of circumstances, his weight is still felt in a France which, facing certain events, reacts with Napoleonic reflexes: how many problems would be easily solved if great shadows of the past did not still cloud our horizon! And some men who were themselves healed by history left for their heirs fevers from which they do not recover.

This study leads to no systematic conclusion. We are grateful to *Diogenes* for permitting us to emerge from our labors and offer reflections and comparisons on just those points which encourage difficulties of a methodological nature. But we shall permit ourselves the expression of a wish. May the historian, the sociologist, and the psychologist work together to give clearer and at the same time more shaded contours to the notion of the representative, which seems, today, to be a sweet which has lost all its flavor. Guizot is offered as the typical representative of the bourgeoisie under Louis-Philippe. His imperious and contemptuous “*Enrichissez-vous*” is quoted. Now Guizot, generous and often lucid, was overflowing with the bourgeois egotism of the 1830’s and 1840’s. The very originality of his ideas even explains his defeat. The men for whom he

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fought did not understand him. In a recent history the free-trade treaties of 1860 are set forth as if they represented the wishes of French industry; it is said that the economy was expanding and that industrialists wanted new markets and an expansion of foreign trade. Looking more closely, one notes, on the contrary, that the large manufacturers, particularly those of the textile industry, remained faithful to the protectionist tradition and were furious when Napoleon III introduced free trade into France. But this sovereign wanted the cost of living to be low so that the poorer segments of the population might participate in the growing prosperity. He was even to favor the creation of a workers' International to counteract the ill will of management. History constantly pursues a double task of adaptation and stylization. Psychologists and sociologists should assist the historian in discovering the characteristics of this double effort. Some temperaments impose their style on history, but most often history does violence to individual temperaments. The man who sees himself as a hero on the battlefield becomes a seminary roué: the workaday *petite bourgeoisie* has no monopoly on Julien Sorels! In romantic eras the round-cheeked merry-andrew of naturally happy disposition withers away of consumption. Every day we discover new riches in the dialogue exchanged between man and history. It is fitting, therefore, for the understanding of this dialogue that we remember (and, in so doing, we are disciples of Ortega y Gasset) that history is not only a forge; it is also a dance.