FOUR

THE REVOLT OF INSTINCT AND REASON

> It is necessary to guard ourselves from thinking that the practice of the scientific method enlarges the powers of the human mind. Nothing is more flatly contradicted by experience than the belief that a man distinguished in one or even more departments of science, is more likely to think sensibly about ordinary affairs than anyone else.
>
> Wilfred Trotter

The Challenge to Property

Although Aristotle was blind to the importance of trade, and lacked any comprehension of evolution; and though Aristotelian thought, once embedded in the system of Thomas Aquinas, supported the anti-commercial attitudes of the mediaeval and early modern Church, it was nonetheless only rather later, and chiefly among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French thinkers, that several important developments occurred which, taken together, began effectively to challenge the central values and institutions of the extended order.

The first of these developments was the growing importance, associated with the rise of modern science, of that particular form of rationalism that I call 'constructivism' or 'scientism' (after the French), which for the following several centuries virtually captured serious thought about reason and its role in human affairs. This particular form of rationalism has been the point of departure of investigations that I have conducted over the past sixty years, investigations in which I tried to show that it is particularly ill-considered, embedding a false theory of science and of rationality in which reason is *abused*, and which, most important here, leads invariably to an erroneous interpretation of the nature and coming into being of human institutions. That interpretation is one by which, in the *name* of reason and the highest values of civilisation, moralists end up flattering the relatively unsuccessful and inciting people to satisfy their primitive desires.

Descending in the modern period from René Descartes, this form of rationalism not only discards tradition, but claims that pure reason can directly serve our desires without any such intermediary, and can build

a new world, a new morality, a new law, even a new and purified language, from itself alone. Although the theory is plainly false (see also Popper, 1934/1959, and 1945/66), it still dominates the thinking of most scientists, and also of most literati, artists, and intellectuals.

I should perhaps immediately qualify what I have just written by adding that there are other strands within what might be called rationalism which treat these matters differently, as for example that which views rules of moral conduct as themselves *part* of reason. Thus John Locke had explained that 'by reason, however, I do not think is meant here the faculty of understanding which forms trains of thoughts and deduces proofs, but definite principles of action from which spring all virtues and whatever is necessary for the moulding of morals' (1954:11). Yet views such as Locke's remain much in the minority among those who call themselves rationalists.

The second, related development which challenged the extended order arose from the work and influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This peculiar thinker – although often described as irrationalist or romantic – also latched on to and deeply depended on Cartesian thought. Rousseau's heady brew of ideas came to dominate 'progressive' thought, and led people to forget that freedom as a political institution had arisen *not* by human beings 'striving for freedom' in the sense of release from restraints, but by their striving for the protection of a known secure individual domain. Rousseau led people to forget that rules of conduct necessarily constrain and that order is their product; and that these rules, precisely by limiting the range of means that each individual may use for his purposes, greatly extend the range of ends each can successfully pursue.

It was Rousseau who – declaring in the opening statement of *The Social Contract* that 'man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains', and wanting to free men from all 'artificial' restraints – made what had been called the savage the virtual hero of progressive intellectuals, urged people to shake off the very restraints to which they owed their productivity and numbers, and produced a conception of liberty that became the greatest obstacle to its attainment. After asserting that animal instinct was a better guide to orderly cooperation among men than *either* tradition or reason, Rousseau invented the fictitious will of the people, or 'general will', through which the people 'becomes one single being, one individual' (*Social Contract*, I, vii; and see Popper, 1945/1966:II, 54). This is perhaps the chief source of the fatal conceit of modern intellectual rationalism that promises to lead us back to a paradise wherein our natural instincts rather than learnt restraints upon them will enable us 'to subdue the world', as we are instructed in the book of *Genesis*.

The admittedly great seductive appeal of this view hardly owes its power (whatever it may claim) to reason and evidence. As we have seen, the savage was far from free; nor could he have subdued the world. He could indeed do little unless the whole group to which he belonged agreed. Individual decision presupposed individual spheres of control, and thus became possible only with the evolution of several property, whose development, in turn, laid the foundation for the growth of an extended order transcending the perception of the headman or chief – or of the collectivity.

Despite these contradictions, there is no doubt that Rousseau's outcry was effective or that, during the past two centuries, it has shaken our civilisation. Moreover, irrationalist as it is, it nonetheless did appeal precisely to progressivists by its Cartesian insinuation that we might use *reason* to obtain and justify direct gratification of our natural instincts. After Rousseau gave intellectual license to throw off cultural restraints, to confer legitimacy on attempts to gain 'freedom' from the restraints that had made freedom possible, and to *call* this attack on the foundation of freedom 'liberation', property became increasingly suspect and was no longer so widely recognised as the key factor that had brought about the extended order. It was increasingly supposed, rather, that rules regulating the delimitation and transfer of several property might be replaced by central decision about its use.

Indeed, by the nineteenth century, serious intellectual appreciation and discussion of the role of property in the development of civilisation would seem to have fallen under a kind of ban in many quarters. During this time property gradually became suspect among many of those who might have been expected to investigate it, a topic to be avoided by progressive believers in a rational reshaping of the structure of human cooperation. (That this ban has persisted into the twentieth century is evinced by, for example, Brian Barry's declarations (1961:80) about usage and 'analyticity', wherein justice 'is now analytically tied to "desert" and "need", so that one could say quite properly that some of what Hume called "rules of justice" were unjust', and Gunnar Myrdal's later mocking remark about the 'taboos of property and contract' (1969:17).) The founders of anthropology, for instance, increasingly neglected the cultural role of property, so that in E. B. Tylor's two volumes on *Primitive Culture* (1871), for instance, neither property nor ownership appear in the index, while E. Westermarck – who did devote a long chapter to property – already treats it, under the influence of Saint–Simon and Marx, as the objectionable source of 'unearned income', and concludes from this that the 'law of property will sooner or later undergo a radical change' (1908:II, 71). The socialist bias of constructivism has also influenced contemporary archaeology, but it

displays its inability to comprehend economic phenomena most crudely in sociology (and even worse in the so-called 'sociology of knowledge'). Sociology itself might almost be called a socialist science, having been openly presented as capable of creating a new order of socialism (Ferri, 1895), or more recently able 'to predict the future development and to shape the future, or . . . create the future of mankind' (Segerstedt, 1969:441). Like the 'naturology' that once pretended to replace all specialised investigations of nature, sociology proceeds in sovereign disregard of knowledge gained by established disciplines that have long studied such grown structures as law, language, and the market.

I have just written that the study of traditional institutions such as property 'fell under a ban'. This is hardly an exaggeration, for it is highly curious that so interesting and important a process as the evolutionary selection of moral traditions has been so little studied, and the direction these traditions gave to the development of civilisation so largely ignored. Of course this will not seem so peculiar to a constructivist. If one suffers under the delusion of 'social engineering', the notion that man can consciously choose where he wants to go, it will not seem so important to discover how he reached his present situation.

It may be mentioned in passing, although I cannot explore the matter here, that challenges to property and traditional values came not only from followers of Rousseau: they also stemmed, although perhaps less importantly, from religion. For the revolutionary movements of this period (rationalistic socialism and then communism) helped to revive old heretical traditions of religious revolt against basic institutions of property and family – revolts directed in earlier centuries by heretics such as the Gnostics, the Manichaeans, the Bogomils, and the Cathars. By the nineteenth century, these particular heretics were gone, but thousands of new religious revolutionaries appeared who directed much of their zeal against both property and the family, also appealing to primitive instincts against such restraints. Rebellion against private property and the family was, in short, not restricted to socialists. Mystic and supernatural beliefs were invoked not only to justify customary restraints upon instincts, as for example in the dominant streams of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but also, in more peripheral movements, to support the release of instincts.

Limits of space as well as insufficient competence forbid me to deal in this book with the second of the traditional objects of atavistic reaction that I have just mentioned: the family. I ought however at least to mention that I believe that new factual knowledge has in some measure deprived traditional rules of sexual morality of some of their foundation, and that it seems likely that in this area substantial changes are bound to occur.

Having mentioned Rousseau and his pervasive influence, as well as these other historical developments, if only to remind readers that the revolt against property and traditional morality on the part of serious thinkers is not just comparatively recent, I shall turn now to some twentieth-century intellectual heirs of Rousseau and Descartes.

First, however, I should emphasise that I am largely neglecting here the long history of this revolt, as well as the different turns it has taken in different lands. Long before Auguste Comte introduced the term 'positivism' for the view that represented a 'demonstrated ethics' (demonstrated by reason, that is) as the only possible alternative to a supernaturally 'revealed ethics' (1854:I, 356), Jeremy Bentham had developed the most consistent foundations of what we now call legal and moral positivism: that is, the constructivistic interpretation of systems of law and morals according to which their validity and meaning are supposed to depend wholly on the will and intention of their designers. Bentham is himself a late figure in this development. This constructivism includes not only the Benthamite tradition, represented and continued by John Stuart Mill and the later English Liberal Party, but also practically all contemporary Americans who call themselves 'liberals' (as opposed to some other very different thinkers, more often found in Europe, who are also called liberals, who are better called 'old Whigs', and whose outstanding thinkers were Alexis de Tocqueville and Lord Acton). This constructivist way of thinking becomes virtually inevitable if, as an acute contemporary Swiss analyst suggests, one accepts the prevailing liberal (read 'socialist') philosophy that assumes that man, so far as the distinction between good and bad has any significance for him at all, must, and can, himself deliberately draw the line between them (Kirsch, 1981:17).

Our Intellectuals and Their Tradition of Reasonable Socialism

What I have suggested about morals and tradition, about economics and the market, and about evolution, obviously conflicts with many influential ideas, not only with the old Social Darwinism discussed in the first chapter, which is no longer widely held, but also with many other viewpoints past and present: with the views of Plato and Aristotle, of Rousseau and the founders of socialism, with those of Saint–Simon, Karl Marx, and many others.

Indeed, the basic point of my argument – that morals, including, especially, our institutions of property, freedom and justice, are not a creation of man's reason but a distinct second endowment conferred on him by cultural evolution – runs counter to the main intellectual outlook of the twentieth century. The influence of rationalism has

indeed been so profound and pervasive that, in general, the more intelligent an educated person is, the more likely he or she now is not only to be a rationalist, but also to hold socialist views (regardless of whether he or she is sufficiently doctrinal to attach to his or her views any label, including 'socialist'). The higher we climb up the ladder of intelligence, the more we talk with intellectuals, the more likely we are to encounter socialist convictions. Rationalists tend to be intelligent and intellectual; and intelligent intellectuals tend to be socialists.

> If I may insert two personal remarks here, I suppose that I can claim to speak with some experience about this outlook because these rationalist views that I have been systematically examining and criticising now for so many years are those on which I, in common with most non-religious European thinkers of my generation, formed my own outlook in the early part of this century. At that time they appeared self-evident, and following them seemed the way to escape pernicious superstitions of all sorts. Having myself spent some time in struggling free from these notions – indeed, discovering in the process that they themselves are superstitions – I can hardly intend personally some of my rather harsh remarks about particular authors in the pages that follow.
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> Moreover, it is perhaps appropriate to remind readers in this place of my essay 'On Why I Am Not a Conservative' (1960: Postscript), lest they draw inaccurate conclusions. Although my argument is directed against socialism, I am as little a Tory-Conservative as was Edmund Burke. My conservatism, such as it is, is entirely confined to morals within certain limits. I am entirely in favour of experimentation – indeed for very much more freedom than conservative governments tend to allow. What I object to among rationalist intellectuals such as those I shall be discussing is not that they experiment; rather, they experiment all too little, and what they fancy to be experimentation turns out mostly to be banal – after all, the idea of returning to instinct is really as common as rain and has by now been tried out so often that it is no longer clear in what sense it can any longer be called experimental. I object to such rationalists because they declare their experiments, such as they are, to be the results of reason, dress them up in pseudo-scientific methodology, and thus, whilst wooing influential recruits and subjecting invaluable traditional practices (the result of ages of evolutionary trial-and-error experiment) to unfounded attack, shelter their own 'experiments' from scrutiny.

One's initial surprise at finding that intelligent people tend to be socialists diminishes when one realises that, of course, intelligent people will tend to overvalue intelligence, and to suppose that we must owe all the advantages and opportunities that our civilisation offers to

deliberate design rather than to following traditional rules, and likewise to suppose that we can, by exercising our reason, eliminate any remaining undesired features by still more intelligent reflection, and still more appropriate design and 'rational coordination' of our undertakings. This leads one to be favourably disposed to the central economic planning and control that lie at the heart of socialism. Of course intellectuals will demand explanations for everything they are expected to do, and will be reluctant to accept practices just because they happen to govern the communities into which they happen to have been born; and this will lead them into conflict with, or at least to a low opinion of, those who quietly accept prevailing rules of conduct. Moreover, they also understandably will want to align themselves with science and reason, and with the extraordinary progress made by the physical sciences during the past several centuries, and since they have been taught that constructivism and scientism are what science and the use of reason are all about, they find it hard to believe that there can exist any useful knowledge that did not originate in deliberate experimentation, or to accept the validity of any tradition apart from their own tradition of reason. Thus a distinguished historian has written in this vein: 'Tradition is almost by definition reprehensible, something to be mocked and deplored' (Seton–Watson, 1983:1270).

> *By definition*: Barry (1961, mentioned above) wanted to make morality and justice immoral and unjust by 'analytic definition'; here Seton–Watson would try the same manoeuvre with tradition, making it by definition reprehensible. We shall return to these *words*, to this 'Newspeak', in chapter seven. Meanwhile let us look more closely at the facts.

These reactions are all understandable, but they have consequences. The consequences are particularly dangerous – to reason as well as to morality – when preference not so much for the real products of reason as for this conventional tradition of reason leads intellectuals to ignore the theoretical limits of reason, to disregard a world of historical and scientific information, to remain ignorant of the biological sciences and the sciences of man such as economics, and to misrepresent the origin and functions of our traditional moral rules.

Like other traditions, the tradition of reason is learnt, not innate. It too lies *between instinct and reason; and the question of the real reasonableness and truth of this tradition of proclaimed reason and truth must now also scrupulously be examined.*

Morals and Reason: Some Examples

Lest I be thought to exaggerate, I shall provide, in a moment, a few examples. But I do not want to be unfair to our great scientists and philosophers, some of whose ideas I shall discuss. Although they, in their own opinions, illustrate the significance of the problem – that our philosophy and natural science are far from understanding the role played by our chief traditions – they themselves are not usually directly responsible for the wide dissemination of these ideas, for they have better things to do. On the other hand, it should also not be supposed that the remarks I am about to cite are merely momentary or idiosyncratic aberrations on the part of their distinguished authors: rather, they are consistent conclusions drawn from a well-established rationalist tradition. And indeed I do not doubt that some of these great thinkers have striven to comprehend the extended order of human cooperation – if only to end as determined, and often unwitting, opponents of this order.

Those who have really done most to spread these ideas, the real bearers of constructivist rationalism and socialism, are, however, not these distinguished scientists. They rather tend to be the so-called 'intellectuals' that I have elsewhere (1949/1967:178–94) unkindly called professional 'second-hand dealers in ideas': teachers, journalists and 'media representatives' who, having absorbed rumours in the corridors of science, appoint themselves as representatives of modern thought, as persons superior in knowledge and moral virtue to any who retain a high regard for traditional values, as persons whose very duty it is to offer new ideas to the public – and who must, in order to make their wares seem novel, deride whatever is conventional. For such people, due to the positions in which they find themselves, 'newness', or 'news', and not truth, becomes the main value, although that is hardly their intention – and although what they offer is often no more new than it is true. Moreover, one might wonder whether these intellectuals are not sometimes inspired by resentment that they, knowing better what ought to be done, are paid so much less than those whose instructions and activities in fact guide practical affairs. Such literary interpreters of scientific and technological advance, of which H. G. Wells, because of the unusually high quality of his work, would be an excellent example, have done far more to spread the socialist ideal of a centrally directed economy in which each is assigned his due share than have the real scientists from whom they have cadged many of their notions. Another such example is that of the early George Orwell, who once argued that 'anyone who uses his brain knows perfectly well that it is within the range of possibility [that] the world, potentially at least, is extremely

rich' such that we could 'develop it as it might be developed, and we could all live like princes, supposing that we wanted to'.

I shall concentrate here not on the work of men like Wells and Orwell, but on views propounded by some of the greatest scientists. We might begin with Jacques Monod. Monod was a great figure whose scientific work I much admire, and was, essentially, the creator of modern molecular biology. His reflections on ethics, however, were of a different quality. In 1970; in a Nobel Foundation symposium concerning 'The Place of Values in a World of Facts', he stated: 'Scientific development has finally destroyed, reduced to absurdity, relegated to the state of nonsensical wishful thinking, the idea that ethics and values are not a matter of our free choice but are rather a matter of obligation for us' (1970:20–21). Later that year, to re-emphasise his views, he argued the same case in a book now famous, *Chance and Necessity* (1970/1977). There he enjoins us, ascetically renouncing all other spiritual nourishment, to acknowledge science as the new and virtually exclusive source of truth, and to revise the foundations of ethics accordingly. The book ends like so many similar pronouncements with the idea that 'ethics, in essence *nonobjective*, is forever barred from the sphere of knowledge' (1970/77:162). The new 'ethic of knowledge does not impose itself on man; *on the contrary, it is he who imposes it upon himself*' (1970/77:164). This new 'ethic of knowledge' is, Monod says, 'the only attitude which is both rational and resolutely idealistic, and on which a real socialism might be built' (1970/77:165–66). Monod's ideas are characteristic in that they are deeply rooted in a theory of knowledge that has attempted to develop a science of behaviour – whether called eudaimonism, utilitarianism, socialism, or whatever – on the grounds that *certain sorts of behaviour better satisfy our wishes*. We are advised to behave in such a way as will permit given situations to satisfy our desires, and make us happier, and such like. In other words, what is wanted is an ethics that men can *deliberately* follow to reach *known*, desired, and pre-selected aims.

Monod's conclusions stem from his opinion that the only other possible way to account for the origin of morals – apart from ascribing them to human invention – is by animistic or anthropomorphic accounts such as are given in many religions. And it is indeed true that 'for mankind as a whole all religions have been intertwined with the anthropomorphic view of the deity as a father, friend or potentate to whom men must do service, pray, etc.' (M. R. Cohen, 1931:112). This aspect of religion I can as little accept as can Monod and the majority of natural scientists. It seems to me to lower something far beyond our comprehension to the level of a slightly superior manlike mind. But to reject this aspect of religion does not preclude our recognising that we

may owe to these religions the preservation – admittedly for false reasons – of practices that were more important in enabling man to survive in large numbers than most of what has been accomplished through reason (see chapter nine below).

Monod is not the only biologist to argue along such lines. A statement by another great biologist and very learned scholar illustrates better than almost any other I have come across the absurdities to which supreme intelligence can be led by a misinterpretation of the 'laws of evolution' (see chapter one above). Joseph Needham writes that 'the new world order of social justice and comradeship, the rational and classless state, is no wild idealistic dream, but a logical extrapolation from the whole course of evolution, having no less authority than that behind it, and therefore of all faiths the most rational' (J. Needham, 1943:41).

I shall return to Monod, but want first to assemble a few further examples. A particularly appropriate instance that I have discussed elsewhere (1978), is John Maynard Keynes, one of the most representative intellectual leaders of a generation emancipated from traditional morals. Keynes believed that, by taking account of foreseeable effects, he could build a better world than by submitting to traditional abstract rules. Keynes used the phrase 'conventional wisdom' as a favourite expression of scorn, and, in a revealing autobiographical account (1938/49/72: X, 446), he told how the Cambridge circle of his younger years, most of whose members later belonged to the Bloomsbury Group, 'entirely repudiated a personal liability on us to obey general rules', and how they were 'in the strict sense of the term, immoralists'. He modestly added that, at the age of fifty-five, he was too old to change and would remain an immoralist. This extraordinary man also characteristically justified some of his economic views, and his general belief in a management of the market order, on the ground that 'in the long run we are all dead' (i.e., it does not matter what long-range damage we do; it is the present moment alone, the short run – consisting of public opinion, demands, votes, and all the stuff and bribes of demagoguery – which counts). The slogan that 'in the long run we are all dead' is also a characteristic manifestation of an unwillingness to recognise that morals are concerned with effects in the long run – effects *beyond our possible perception* – and of a tendency to spurn the learnt discipline of the long view.

Keynes also argued against the moral tradition of the 'virtue of saving', refusing, along with thousands of crank economists, to admit that a reduction of the demand for consumers' goods is generally required to make an increase of the production of capital goods (i.e., investment) possible.

> And this in turn led him to devote his formidable intellectual powers to develop his 'general' theory of economics – to which we owe the unique world-wide inflation of the third quarter of our century and the inevitable consequence of severe unemployment that has followed it (Hayek, 1972/1978).
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> Thus it was not philosophy alone that confused Keynes. It was also economics. Alfred Marshall, who understood the matter, seems to have failed to impress adequately upon Keynes one of the important insights that John Stuart Mill had gained in his youth: namely, that 'the demand for commodities is not a demand for labour'. Sir Leslie Stephen (the father of Virginia Woolf, another member of the Bloomsbury group) described this doctrine in 1876 as a 'doctrine so rarely understood, that its complete appreciation is, perhaps, the best test of an economist' – and was ridiculed for saying so by Keynes. (See Hayek, 1970/78:15–16, 1973:25, and (on Mill and Stephen) 1941:433ff.)

Although Keynes was, in spite of himself, to contribute greatly to the weakening of freedom, he shocked his Bloomsbury friends by not sharing their general socialism; yet most of his students were socialists of one sort or other. Neither he nor these students recognised how the extended order must be based on long-run considerations.

The philosophic illusion that lay behind the views of Keynes, that there exists an indefinable attribute of 'goodness' – one to be discovered by every individual, which imposes on each a duty to pursue it, and whose recognition justifies contempt for and disregard of much of traditional morals (a view which through the work of G. E. Moore (1903) dominated the Bloomsbury group) – produced a characteristic enmity to the sources on which he fed. This was evident for instance also in E. M. Forster, who seriously argued that freeing mankind from the evils of 'commercialism' had become as urgent as had been freeing it from slavery.

Sentiments similar to those of Monod and Keynes come from a less distinguished yet still influential scientist: the psychoanalyst who became the first Secretary General of the World Health Organisation, G. B. Chisholm. Chisholm advocated no less than 'the eradication of the concept of right and wrong' and maintained that it was the task of the psychiatrist to free the human race from 'the crippling burden of good and evil' – advice which at the time received praise from high American legal authority. Here again, morality is seen – since it is not 'scientifically' grounded – as irrational, and its status as embodiment of accumulated cultural knowledge goes unrecognised.

Let us turn, however, to a scientist even greater than Monod or Keynes, to Albert Einstein, perhaps the greatest genius of our age.

Einstein was concerned with a different yet closely related theme. Using a popular socialist slogan, he wrote that 'production for use' ought to replace the 'production for profit' of the capitalist order (1956:129).

> 'Production for use' means here the kind of work which, in the small group, is guided by anticipating for whose use the product is intended. But this sentiment fails to take into account the sorts of considerations advanced in the foregoing chapters, and to be argued again in the following: only the differences between expected prices for different commodities and services and their costs, in the self-generating order of the market, tell the individual how best to contribute to the pool from which we all draw in proportion to our contribution. Einstein appears to have been unaware that only calculation and distribution in terms of market prices make it possible to utilise our discoverable resources intensively, to guide production to serve ends lying beyond the range of the producer's perception, and to enable the individual to participate usefully in productive exchange (first, by serving people, mostly unknown to him, to the gratification of whose needs he can nonetheless effectively contribute; and second, by himself being supplied as well as he is only because people who know nothing about *his* existence are induced, also by market signals, to provide for his needs: see the previous chapter). In following such sentiments Einstein shows his lack of comprehension of, or real interest in, the actual processes by which human efforts are coordinated.

Einstein's biographer reports that Einstein regarded it as obvious that 'human reason must be capable of finding a method of distribution which would work as effectively as that of production' (Clark, 1971:559) – a description that reminds one of the philosopher Bertrand Russell's claim that a society could not be regarded as 'fully scientific' unless 'it has been created deliberately with a certain structure to fulfil certain purposes' (1931:203). Such demands, particularly in Einstein's mouth, seemed so superficially plausible that even a sensible philosopher, twitting Einstein for talking beyond his competence in some of his popular writings, stated approvingly that 'Einstein is clearly aware that the present economic crisis is due to our system of production for profit rather than for use, to the fact that our tremendous increase of productive power is not actually followed by a corresponding increase in the purchasing power of the great masses' (M. R. Cohen, 1931:119).

We also find Einstein repeating (in the essay cited) familiar phrases of socialist agitation about the 'economic anarchy of capitalist society' in which 'the payment of the workers is not determined by the value of the product', while 'a planned economy . . . would distribute the work to be done among all those able to work', and such like.

A similar but more guarded view appears in an essay by Einstein's collaborator Max Born (1968: chap.5). While Born evidently realised that our extended order no longer gratified primitive instincts, he too failed to examine closely the structures that create and maintain this order, or to see that our instinctual morals have over the past five thousand years or more gradually been replaced or restrained. Thus, although perceiving that 'science and technology have destroyed the ethical basis of civilisation, perhaps irreparably', he imagines that they have done so by the facts they have uncovered rather than by their having systematically discredited beliefs that fail to satisfy certain 'standards of acceptability' demanded by constructivist rationalism (see below). While admitting that 'no one has yet devised a means of keeping society together without traditional ethical principles', Born yet hopes that these can be replaced 'by means of the traditional method used in science'. He too fails to see that what lies *between* instinct and reason cannot be replaced by 'the traditional method used in science'.

My examples are taken from statements of important twentieth-century figures; I have not included countless other such figures, such as R. A. Millikan, Arthur Eddington, F. Soddy, W. Ostwald, E. Solvay, J. D. Bernal, all of whom talked much nonsense on economic matters. Indeed, one could cite hundreds of similar statements by scientists and philosophers of comparable renown – both from centuries past and from the present time. But we can, I believe, learn more by taking a closer look at these particular contemporary examples – and at what lies behind them – than simply by piling up citations and examples. Perhaps the first thing to notice is that, although far from identical, these examples have a certain family resemblance.

A Litany of Errors

The ideas raised in these examples have in common a number of closely interconnected thematic roots, roots that are not just matters of common historical antecedents. Readers unfamiliar with some of the background literature may not immediately see some of the interconnections. Hence I should like, before further probing these ideas themselves, to identify a number of recurring themes – most of which may appear at first glance to be unobjectionable and all of which are familiar – which, taken together, form a sort of argument. This 'argument' could also be described as a litany of errors, or as a recipe for producing the presumptive rationalism that I call scientism and constructivism. To start on our way, let us consult that ready 'source of knowledge', the dictionary, a book containing many recipes. I have

gathered from the very useful *Fontana/Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977) a few short definitions of four basic philosophical concepts that generally guide contemporary thinkers educated along scientistic and constructivistic lines: rationalism, empiricism, positivism, and utilitarianism – concepts which have, during the past several hundred years, come to be regarded as representative expressions of the scientific 'spirit of the age'. According to these definitions, which are written by Lord Quinton, a British philosopher who is President of Trinity College, Oxford, *rationalism* denies the acceptability of beliefs founded on anything but experience and reasoning, deductive or inductive. *Empiricism* maintains that all statements claiming to express knowledge are limited to those depending for their justification on experience. *Positivism* is defined as the view that all true knowledge is scientific, in the sense of describing the coexistence and succession of observable phenomena. And *utilitarianism* 'takes the pleasure and pain of everyone affected by it to be the criterion of the action's rightness'.

In such definitions one finds quite explicitly, just as one finds implicitly in the examples cited in the preceding section, the declarations of faith of modern science and philosophy of science, and their declarations of war against moral traditions. These declarations, definitions, postulates, have created the impression that only that which is rationally justifiable, only that which is provable by observational experiment, only that which can be experienced, only that which can be surveyed, deserves belief; that only that which is pleasurable should be acted upon, and that all else must be repudiated. This in turn leads directly to the contention that the leading moral traditions that have created and are creating our culture – which certainly cannot be justified in such ways, and which are often disliked – are unworthy of adherence, and that our task must be to construct a new morality on the basis of scientific knowledge – usually the new morality of socialism.

These definitions, together with our earlier examples, when examined more closely, prove indeed to contain the following presuppositions:

1) The idea that it is unreasonable to follow what one cannot justify scientifically or prove observationally (Monod, Born).

2) The idea that it is unreasonable to follow what one does not understand. This notion is implicit in all our examples, but I must confess that I too once held it, and have also been able to find it in a philosopher with whom I generally agree. Thus Sir Karl Popper once claimed (1948/63:122; emphasis added) that rationalist thinkers 'will not submit blindly to *any* tradition', which is of course just as impossible as obeying no tradition. This must, however, have been a slip of the pen, for elsewhere he has rightly observed that 'we never know what we are talking about' (1974/1976:27, on which see also Bartley, 1985/1987).

(Though the free man will insist on his right to examine and, when appropriate, to reject any tradition, he could not live among other people if he refused to accept countless traditions without even thinking about them, and of whose effects he remains ignorant.)

3) The related idea that it is unreasonable to follow a particular course unless its *purpose* is fully specified in advance (Einstein, Russell, Keynes).

4) The idea, also closely related, that it is unreasonable to do anything unless its *effects* are not only fully known in advance but also fully observable and seen to be beneficial (the utilitarians). (Assumptions 2, 3, and 4, are, despite their different emphases, nearly identical; but I have distinguished them here to call attention to the fact that the arguments for them turn, depending on who is defending them, either on lack of understandability generally, or, more particularly, on lack of specified purpose or lack of complete and observable knowledge of effects.)

One could name further requirements, but these four – which we shall examine in the following two chapters – will suffice for our (largely illustrative) purposes. Two things might be noticed about these requirements from the very start. First, not one of them shows any awareness that there might be limits to our knowledge or reason in certain areas, or considers that, in such circumstances, the most important task of science might be to discover what these limits are. We shall learn below that there are such limits and that they can indeed partially be overcome, as for example through the science of economics or 'catallactics', but that *they cannot be overcome if one holds to the above four requirements*. Second, one finds in the approach underlying the requirements not only lack of understanding, not only the failure to consider or deal with such problems, but also a curious lack of curiosity about how our extended order actually came into being, how it is maintained, and what the consequences might be of destroying those traditions that created and maintain it.

Positive and Negative Liberty

Some rationalists would want to advance an additional complaint that we have hardly considered: namely, that the morality and institutions of capitalism not only fail to meet the logical, methodological, and epistemological requirements reviewed already, but also impose a crippling burden on our freedom – as, for example, our freedom to 'express' ourselves unrestrainedly.

This complaint cannot be met by denying the obvious, a truth with

which we opened this book – that moral tradition does seem burdensome to many – but can only be answered by observing again, here and in subsequent chapters, what we derive from bearing this burden, and what the alternative would be. Virtually all the benefits of civilisation, and indeed our very existence, rest, I believe, on our continuing willingness to shoulder the burden of tradition. These benefits in no way 'justify' the burden. But the alternative is poverty and famine.

Without attempting to recount or review all these benefits, to 'count our blessings', as it were, I may mention again, in a somewhat different context, perhaps the most ironic benefit of all – for I have in mind our very freedom. Freedom requires that the individual be allowed to pursue *his own* ends: one who is free is in peacetime no longer bound by the common concrete ends of his community. Such freedom of individual decision is made possible by delimiting distinct individual rights (the rights of property, for example) and designating domains within which each can dispose over means known to him for his own ends. That is, a recognisable free sphere is determined for each person. This is all-important. For to have something of one's own, however little, is also the foundation on which a distinctive personality can be formed and a distinctive environment created within which particular individual aims can be pursued.

But confusion has been created by the common supposition that it is possible to have this kind of freedom without restraints. This supposition appears in the *aperçu* ascribed to Voltaire that 'quand je peux faire ce que je veux, voilà la liberté', in Bentham's declaration that 'every law is an evil, for every law is an infraction of liberty' (1789/1887:48), in Bertrand Russell's definition of liberty as the 'absence of obstacles to the realisation of our desires' (1940:251), and in countless other sources. General freedom in this sense is nevertheless impossible, for the freedom of each would founder on the unlimited freedom, i.e., the lack of restraint, of all others.

The question then is how to secure the greatest possible freedom for all. This can be secured by uniformly restricting the freedom of all by abstract rules that preclude arbitrary or discriminatory coercion by or of other people, that prevent any from invading the free sphere of any other (see Hayek 1960 and 1973, and chapter two above). In short, common concrete ends are replaced by common abstract rules. Government is needed only to enforce these abstract rules, and thereby to protect the individual against coercion, or invasion of his free sphere, by others. Whereas enforced obedience to common concrete ends is tantamount to slavery, obedience to common abstract rules (however burdensome they may still feel) provides scope for the most extra-

ordinary freedom and diversity. Although it is sometimes supposed that such diversity brings chaos threatening the relative order that we also associate with civilisation, it turns out that greater diversity brings greater order. Hence the type of liberty made possible by adhering to abstract rules, in contrast to freedom from restraint, is, as Proudhon once put it, 'the mother, not the daughter, of order'.

There is in fact no reason to expect that the selection by evolution of habitual practices should produce happiness. The focus on happiness was introduced by rationalist philosophers who supposed that a conscious reason had to be discovered for the choice of men's morals, and that that reason might prove to be the deliberate pursuit of happiness. But to ask for the conscious reason why man adopted his morals is as mistaken as to ask for what conscious reason man adopted his reason.

Nevertheless, the possibility that the evolved order in which we live provides us with opportunities for happiness that equal or exceed those provided by primitive orders to far fewer people should not be dismissed (which is not to say that such matters can be calculated). Much of the 'alienation' or unhappiness of modern life stems from two sources, one of which affects primarily intellectuals, the other, all beneficiaries of material abundance. The first is a self-fulfilling prophecy of unhappiness for those within any 'system' that does not satisfy rationalistic criteria of conscious control. Thus intellectuals from Rousseau to such recent figures in French and German thought as Foucault and Habermas regard alienation as rampant in any system in which an order is 'imposed' on individuals without their conscious consent; consequently, their followers tend to find civilisation unbearable – by definition, as it were. Secondly, the persistence of instinctual feelings of altruism and solidarity subject those who follow the impersonal rules of the extended order to what is now fashionably called 'bad conscience'; similarly, the acquisition of material success is supposed to be attended with feelings of guilt (or 'social conscience'). In the midst of plenty, then, there is unhappiness not only born of peripheral poverty, but also of the incompatibility, on the part of instinct and of a hubristic reason, with an order that is of a decidedly non-instinctive and extra-rational character.

'Liberation' and Order

On a less sophisticated level than the argument against 'alienation' are the demands for 'liberation' from the burdens of civilisation – including the burdens of disciplined work, responsibility, risk-taking, saving, honesty, the honouring of promises, as well as the difficulties of curbing

by general rules one's natural reactions of hostility to strangers and solidarity with those who are like oneself – an ever more severe threat to political liberty. Thus the notion of 'liberation', although allegedly new, is actually archaic in its demand for release from traditional morals. Those who champion such liberation would destroy the basis of freedom, and permit men to do what would irreparably break down those conditions that make civilisation possible. One example appears in so-called 'liberation theology', especially within the Roman Catholic church in South America. But this movement is not confined to South America. Everywhere, in the name of liberation, people disavow practices that enabled mankind to reach its present size and degree of cooperation because they do not *rationally* see, according to their lights, how certain limitations on individual freedom through legal and moral rules make possible a greater – and freer! – order than can be attained through centralised control.

Such demands stem chiefly from the tradition of rationalistic liberalism that we have already discussed (so different from the political liberalism deriving from the English Old Whigs), which implies that freedom is incompatible with any general restriction on individual action. This tradition voices itself in the passages cited earlier from Voltaire, Bentham, and Russell. Unfortunately it also pervades even the work of the English 'saint of rationalism', John Stuart Mill.

Under the influence of these writers, and perhaps especially Mill, the fact that we must purchase the freedom enabling us to form an extended order at the cost of submitting to certain rules of conduct has been used as a justification for the demand to return to the state of 'liberty' enjoyed by the savage who – as eighteenth-century thinkers defined him – 'did not yet know property'. Yet the savage state – which includes the obligation or duty to share in pursuit of the concrete goals of one's fellows, and to obey the commands of a headman – can hardly be described as one of freedom (although it might involve liberation from some particular burdens) or even as one of morals. Only those general and abstract rules that one must take into account in individual decisions in accordance with individual aims deserve the name of morals.