III

THE DESPAIR OF CIVILIZATION

The eighteenth century registered a shift from reasoned theodicy and complacent optimism towards manifold disdain, revulsion, and rebellion: a shift gradual at first which gained momentum. A movement which found its two leaders in Voltaire and Rousseau is not to be defined in a simple formula; the transition of the European mind from the placid Enlightenment to the Romantic revolt involved a revision in logic which not only elicited new conclusions from old premises, but likewise imposed radically new propositions for new syllogisms.

The theodicies in prose and in verse had agreed that "Whatever is, is right;" the new spirit could have found its motto in the words of Marcellus in *Hamlet*: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark;" but there was grave disagreement in diagnosis as to what was rotten. Voltaire, embittered by the stupidity, intolerance, and cruelty of men, dismayed by the brutal indifference of nature to human weal or woe, defiantly scorned the idea of benevolent Divine Providence as a superstition; but holding fast to his trust in the intellect and in civilization, never lost faith in progress through enlightenment and tolerance. Rousseau's diagnosis was both simpler and more radical: God is good, and so is man as God made him; evil is not in nature but unnatural, due to the corruption of man by civilization, with its pride of intellect, its depravity, injustice, and oppression of man by man.
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This is no mere pundit controversy: both as allies and as opponents these two men loom large, not only in the history of ideas, but in the pages of Europe’s political and social life during the last century and a half. The seething multitudes, which greeted Voltaire on his triumphal return to Paris in 1778, after an absence of thirty years, stormed the Bastile eleven years later. Marat read Rousseau’s *Contrat Social* to enthusiastic audiences in the public squares of Paris, and Robespierre undertook to make revolutionary France worship at the shrine of the Savoyard Vicar. Empress Catherine of Russia, aghast at perceiving the real drift of the new ideas, ordered Voltaire’s bust removed from her desk to the lumber-room, but her caution was tardy and futile.

The earliest revolutionaries of Russia were avowed Voltaireans, and endeavored to reënact in Petersburg and in Moscow the Paris drama of emancipation. Young Tolstoy carried around his neck a medallion with Rousseau’s portrait, and it was on the centenary of Rousseau’s death that Tolstoy began in earnest his social and religious apostolate. While a good deal besides Voltaire and Rousseau has entered into the Russian revolution, whose tenth anniversary was celebrated but yesterday, is it quite beside the point to indicate the clash of motives, both social-political and cultural-religious, which divide Russian liberal and radical opinion today: and is it altogether misleading to compare this clash of motives with the clash in the French Revolution of the Voltairean and the Rousseauistic strains?

Voltaire had started in his youth as an optimistic believer in Divine Providence and Infinite Benevolent Justice. But increasing scepticism, lifelong conflict with ecclesiastic bigotry, which embittered him against all organized religion, made his view of the world increasingly grim. His ironical
reaction against his earlier optimism came to a head in 1755, after the Lisbon earthquake, and in his poem on the Lisbon Disaster he shocked all Europe with his violent disdain of all theodicies and of all doctrines of Divine Providence in this best of all possible worlds.

Do the facts of life justify belief in a benevolent Divine Providence, and if they do not, what standing ground is left for despairing but unyielding humanity? How is placid theodicy to dispose of a Lisbon disaster? Is Lisbon engulfed because of its sins? But then why not Paris and London as well? Or if the earthquake is a mere event in the order of nature, is it beyond the reach of Divine Goodness to prevent, or has it been preferred by Eternal Wisdom as the least evil of all possible alternatives? Would the universe have been worse for sparing Lisbon this disaster? Is God testing Lisbon’s virtue in his fiery furnace? Or is he the impassive spectator of his anguished creation? Or is matter, crude and resistant to Divine Perfection, the source and medium of our woes? These are all blind alleys and lead us to shuddering confusion. Voltaire says. "Alas, I am like a doctor; I know nothing."

This dark scepticism is not of the tragically pious variety, as Pascal’s; it is deliberately and sneeringly aggressive. In this wretched world one of Voltaire’s undoubted joys, during the later part of his life, was flaying optimists to disclose their unsound substance. His irony is blighting. What do you mean by your formula that "all is well in this world?" Ordered it is in accordance with moving forces and necessary laws; but can you mean that it is a happy world, that all is well with you, with me, that no one suffers? "Here is an odd general good, composed of gallstones, gout, and all sorts of crimes, sufferings, death, and damna-
tation.” So Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, and Pope speak of the universal order; and universal it is: “Flies are born to be devoured by spiders, who in turn are devoured by swallows, and swallows by shrikes, and shrikes by eagles, and eagles are born to be killed by men, who in turn live to kill each other and to be consumed by worms or by devils, at least in a thousand cases to one.” The novel *Candide* is an elaborate satire on this best of all possible worlds. Far be it from poor Candide to doubt the ‘metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigology’ of the great Pangloss, but his own experiences leave him sorely perplexed again and again. “If this is the best of possible worlds, what must the others be like!” But he never gives up hope; fleeing from Portugal and bound for Paraguay, he remarks: “Now we are going to another world, ... it is in that one, no doubt, that all is well.” And all is well: in Eldorado! But outside of Eldorado, even Candide in the course of time becomes weary of Pangloss’ philosophizing: “That is well said,—but we should cultivate our garden.”

This in fact was Voltaire’s solution, in so far as he had any solution. Renouncing theodicy and entangled in the gray webs of doubt, he never lost his faith in civilization; this at least was at hand and reliable: cultivating our garden. “Let us work without reasoning; ... this is the only way of making life endurable.” One can live through Monday by this gospel alone; whether intelligent man can thus live through the week of life is an open question, which we can not quite ignore. But it was not with this question that Rousseau confronted Voltaire; rather, with the bold assertion that Voltaire had made a cosmic tragedy of evils which for the most part man had brought on himself, and that precisely by becoming civilized. So the issue was sharply drawn.
To appreciate the violence and the immediate effectiveness of Rousseau's attack on civilization, we should keep in mind the fundamental contrast which this dalliant vagabond genius presented to the culture of his time. Here was a man hypersensitive, violently lyrical, irresponsible, nomadic, with a longing for the ideal and a leaning for the degenerate. Sentimental like his father who gave him his early maudlin training, and like his father, unstable; a coward before duty yet reckless in adventure; chafing under the hardships of one trade after another, and running away from his native town, Geneva, in order to escape a beating from his master; induced to change his Calvinist faith by Father Pontverre's excellent Frangi wine, Mme. De Warens' fine blue eyes, and the dazzling prospect of a trip over the Alps; disgusted with the priests that made him Catholic; tasting the bitterness of the lackey's life in Turin and at the same time glowing with his sense of inner superiority to his outward status, yet with dastardly cruelty ruining a young servant girl's future by falsely accusing her of theft merely in order to avoid a slight personal embarrassment; sighing impatiently for his great chance, but incapable of steady pursuit of the real opportunity presented to him by Count Gouvon; running away from his slow good fortune in order to follow another young vagabond who had caught his fancy; living on the bounty of Mme. De Warens, trying study, trying music, going off with his music master, only to abandon him in Lyons when the old man falls down on a street corner in an epileptic fit; advancing slowly from a charlatan to something of an expert in music; living on terms of irresponsible intimacy with Mme. De Warens; dreaming of the brilliant future that is to atone for his undistinguished present and disreputable past; and then going off to Paris at the
age of twenty-nine to conquer the world with a new system of musical notation.

The Academy of Inscriptions damns him with faint praise; he languishes hoping for the smiles of great ladies, and gets some; goes off to Venice as able secretary to an incompetent and unjust ambassador; in spite of efficient personal record is dismissed without pay, and finds officialdom as slow to recognize a plebeian's just claims against aristocracy as academies of learning to welcome a new idea. And so, chafing and rebellious, he sees his years pass and leave him behind, unrecognized and misunderstood, his life one of ardent longing, inarticulate, unrealized. "Deep down within him," Gerhard Gran writes, "there constantly muttered a still inarticulate protest; the Genevan in him revolted against the worldly splendour he saw about him, the vagabond was sometimes seized by an inexpressible longing to get away from the golden cage of the artificial world in which he felt imprisoned, the democrat was offended in his innermost depths at the sight of the social chasms that separated human beings, the mystic shivered in the cold atmosphere of intellect in which he moved."

Almost two-thirds of his life are gone, when suddenly like a flash of lightning he sees the wisdom which is to be his wisdom, and like a peal of thunder he makes it reverberate all over the world. Rousseau's own account of his conversion is justly famous: it reveals him so vividly that after reading it we need not be surprised at his gospel. Walking one hot afternoon on the road from Paris to Vincennes, bound on a visit to Diderot, he read in a newspaper the announcement of a prize essay set by the Dijon Academy on the subject: "Has the restoration of the sciences and the arts contributed to purify or to corrupt manners?" "If ever anything resembled a sudden inspiration," he writes, "it was
the movement which began in me as I read this. All at once I felt myself dazzled by a thousand sparkling lights; crowds of vivid ideas thronged into my mind with a force and confusion that threw me into unspeakable agitation; I felt my head whirling in a giddiness like that of intoxication. A violent palpitation oppressed me; unable to walk for difficulty of breathing, I sank under one of the trees of the avenue, and passed half an hour there in such a condition of excitement, that when I arose I saw that the front of my waistcoat was all wet with my tears, though I was wholly unconscious of shedding them. Ah, if I could ever have written the quarter of what I saw or felt under that tree, with what clearness should I have brought out all the contradictions of our social system; with what simplicity I should have demonstrated that man is good naturally, and that by institutions only is he made bad."

Some of this is probably maudlin romancing, but that all of it was pure invention, that Rousseau's first plan was to write the usual hackneyed essay in praise of culture, and that Diderot suggested to him the less conventional idea, does not rest on sufficient evidence. What was revolutionary was not Rousseau's thesis itself, that arts and sciences have served to corrupt society; the Dijon Academy was of course prepared for an essay on the negative side of the question proposed, and the thing had been done before. What was original in Rousseau's thesis was "the fervour, sincerity, and conviction of a most unacademic sort with which it was presented and enforced." Rousseau's whole life had been a preparation for this essay: this harangue which shocked and impressed all France was in fact an apology for his own life. The intensity is lyrically motivated. The question of the Dijon Academy, as he says, "suddenly opened his eyes, brought order into the chaos of his mind, revealed a new
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world to him, a true golden age, a society made up of natural, wise, happy creatures, and brought him the hope of realizing all his visions, by destroying all the prejudices to which he himself had formerly been subjected, but in which he at that moment believed that he saw the origin of all the vices and miseries of mankind.

Rousseau's first complaint of civilization is the complaint of a Diogenes. In plain noonday he searches Paris over with a lantern looking vainly for a real man, and finding only varnished masks. He finds, in place of genuine ardor, stereotyped, elegant passion; artificial and deceptive politeness instead of candor, the same conventional veneer on all sides hiding the real individual; cowardice and hypocrisy, arrogance or servility according to the code that imposes itself on each man, to keep him in his place. And in this soil of cultured artificiality vices and depravity flourish like weeds: no more sincere friendship, genuine respect, firm confidence; instead of these, suspicion, slander, fear, arrogance, treachery, all hiding beneath a uniform and perfidious veil of etiquette.

This corruption of human nature, Rousseau declares, not only follows the spread of the arts and sciences, but it is in proportion to that spread, and is indeed the effect of the spread. Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Empires of the Orient one and all went down in decay and degradation due to their becoming civilized. But the rude races of history, the earlier Romans, the Scythians, the Germans abide in history as models of pure, simple, soundheart human nature. To the defenders of the arts and the sciences Rousseau sought to make his point clear; so he writes to King Stanislas: "It is not from science, I am told, but from riches that, in all ages, sprang nobility and luxury. I never said that luxury was the child of science, but that they were born together and that
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one could not go without the other. This is how I arranged this genealogy. The first source of all evil is inequality: from inequality sprang riches . . . from riches, luxury and idleness. From luxury came the fine arts, and from idleness, science."

And what is the origin of inequality, the fountain-source of all evil? Rousseau gave his answer in his second essay, a necessary corollary to the first. In this revolutionary work, Rousseau painted the life of the savage as a life of uncorrupted virtue and freedom, a life in which there obtained physical inequalities of strength and skill, but no artificial enslavement of man by man: instead of this, simple coöperation in a rudimentary society, utilizing the abilities of each for the good of all, and elementary comfort of life without luxury, but also without squalor. In learning how to work metals and to cultivate the soil, man saw opportunities to grow above the heads of his fellows; this chance he took, and the institution of private property, raising the rich over the poor, demanded a social and political order that would safely and permanently keep the poor under the heel of the rich: and this is indeed the clear though not always frankly avowed purpose of governments, enslavers of mankind. Private property and the inequality which it breeds and signalizes is the root of the tree civilization, of which arts and sciences are the blossoms, and moral corruption and misery the fruits. "The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, could think of saying, This is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, miseries, and horrors would not have been spared to the human race by one who, plucking up the stakes, or filling in the trench, should have called out to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you
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forget that the earth belongs to no one, and that its fruits are for all."

To Voltaire, Rousseau's thought and practice seemed alike misguided. "I have received, sir," he wrote him, "your new book against mankind.... Never before has as much wit been devoted to render us all stupid brutes; on reading your work, one is moved to walk on all fours." Rousseau did not miss the opportunity of returning the compliment when Voltaire's poem on the Lisbon earthquake appeared. Excepting death, which is scarcely in itself an evil, he says, most of our physical ills are due to our own perverted form of life. Is nature to blame that 20,000 houses, all six or seven stories high, were huddled together in an earthquake area? Had the inhabitants of Lisbon lived as nature intended man to live, as primitive men live in the plains or forests, the few who first felt the tremor would speedily have fled across the fields, and in any case would have been in no imminent danger. Besides, who knows, perhaps those who died in Lisbon escaped thereby worse and more prolonged sufferings. Rousseau repeats familiar arguments from Pope and Leibniz: If God exists, He is perfect, He is wise, puissant, and just; then all is well, and our souls are immortal, and it makes little difference whether we do or do not live thirty years longer; and perhaps these thirty years which I miss are necessary to the order of the universe.

But the important difference between Voltaire and Rousseau is not in their views of Divine Providence. What is significant is their estimate of civilization in relation to their estimate of nature and God. Voltaire, as we have seen, while despairing of finding evidence of a providential plan or meaning in this sorry world, yet never loses his confidence in the upward climb of man or his faith in enlightenment. But Voltaire despised the stupid masses: oxen that
need yoke, whip, and hay. Life is a sorry jest, which intelligence may enable us to understand and endure. Now Rousseau took just the opposite view: praising the Lord, clinging to the faith which Voltaire unsettled, glorifying nature and the free, ignorant savage, and tracing all our evils to the very civilization in which Voltaire found man's one glimmer of comfort. So in the significant contrast which we are here observing, it is Rousseau who appears as the pessimist,—disdainer of civilization and of the cultural values as perversions of the primitive soundheart nature.

But what is this nature which Rousseau worships as perfect and the corruption of which by society and civilization he constantly bewails? The concept of nature has not been defined clearly by Rousseau, nor has he used it consistently in a manner to allow of precise definition by others. Höfding has distinguished three views of nature which may be found in Rousseau's works. "Nature," in a theological sense, is for Rousseau the simplicity and harmony of God's original creation, contrasted with its artificial perversion by civilized man. Man has distorted God's work: salvation thus involves the restoration of the majestic simplicity of God's creation. In a naturalistic sense, "nature" is purely instinctive existence, without reflection or imagination, a life of action in response to purely physical needs and stimuli. The transformation of this life into that of civilization is unwholesome and unnatural: "If nature destined us to a healthy life, I dare almost affirm that the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature, and that thinking man is a depraved animal."

Rousseau's third use of the term "nature" is in a psychological sense. In affirming the essential and natural goodness of man, Rousseau means that man's fundamental, primitive impulses are good: men are evil, but man is good.
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This is the appeal to the heart, to those inner feelings and longings in which man, despite untoward circumstances and an unfortunate or even disreputable career in society, may yet claim for himself the virtue and the precious worth for which his heart thirsts. Here is perhaps the most significant strain in Rousseau’s thinking: this flood of feeling in which all literature was soon to be submerged, this protesting and craving individualism of the misunderstood, of the insulted and injured, the eulogy of the vagabond and his inner alleged purity, the cult of the criminal and the prostitute, victims of circumstance and social inequity and iniquity. Rousseau in Venice weeps at the feet of Zulietta, and with better right in cold Petersburg, Raskolnikov is to weep at the feet of Sonia. This third view of nature is manifest in the nostalgic, wistful, and only half-expressible emotionalism, sentiment that could degenerate into sentimentality, a heart-breaking sense of alienation in the actual and the hunger of the heart after vanished or unrealized perfection: the individualism of sensitive suffering souls for whom this world was too much, yet who like Rousseau felt stifled in the universe. It is the quintessence of romanticism.

So we find these central ideas of Rousseau in his three major works which in a sense form a trilogy: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” Taking man as he is, what should be done to save or to recover for man as much of the freedom of his primitive state of nature as is possible in civil society? This is the theme of the Contrat Social. In La Nouvelle Héloïse Rousseau exalts unconstrained, straightforward love in contrast to the elegant conventionalized passions of the salon. This is the emotional romantic return to nature, to genuine and unashamed and consuming devotion. And in Émile he would safeguard through education man’s natural gifts, and thus allow them free range to
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develop and come to fruition, so that the human nature of the child, created perfect by God, may not be allowed to degenerate by social maleducation. And the same redemption of human nature from the corruptions of civilization he proposes in man's religious life, in the *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*: not a Christianity of theological rigid orthodoxy, elaborate ritual, ecclesiastic pomp and circumstance, but rather an intimate mystical-emotional faith, individual, spontaneous outpouring of the human soul, a religion of tenderness, charity, trust, and soul-soothing quietism. Thus we see Rousseau chafing in the straitjacket of civilization, wriggling uncomfortably, and trying to win for himself and for others as large a measure as might be of that blessed lost freedom and spontaneity which, as he imagined, uncorrupted primitive man possessed.

There is little logic or consistency in his works, and less of it in his life. The man who advocated education of children according to nature, had turned his own children one after the other to the Foundlings' Asylum. The man who glorified the simple life of freedom in the bosom of nature lived his life as the protégé of one aristocrat after another. The man who exalted intimate and utter personal devotion was morbidly suspicious of his own friends and forgot or lost them in a manner that is apt to invite mingled contempt and pity. And yet the ideas which so passionately possessed him, and the new passions to which he gave so thrilling an utterance, became mighty forces in the thought and in the life of mankind.

Shall we dispose of the matter easily by styling Rousseauism the vagabond tradition in our modern life, the impetuous outpouring of the uncontrolled, the defiant protest of the submerged, the sentimental pathos of the morbid, the neglected intimate, and the misunderstood? Is distrust of
Rousseauism and resistance to its romantic nonsense an acid test of sanity in a modern man? So large and so real elements of truth are implied in the very asking of these questions that one is only too apt to lapse into error by mistaking the partial for the more complete truth. The verdict which Rousseau passed on civilization and on our cultural values can be estimated in more adequate and more contemporary terms if we consider in this connection the gospel preached in our own day by the man whom we may regard as Rousseau's greatest pupil, for he was more than a mere pupil: a volcano of passions but also a granite-wall of resolute will, an iconoclast less sentimental and more candid and heroic than Rousseau.

There is a mistaken notion that at the age of fifty, after he had written War and Peace and Anna Karenina, Tolstoy suddenly turned right about face and changed his entire course and view of life. On more careful scrutiny, however, we find in the later Tolstoy only the explicit recognition of a truth which must have been lurking in his inner being all his life. His favorite game as a child was to search for the green stick on which was carved the secret of universal happiness. This green stick was supposedly buried somewhere on the family estate, but the children never found it, for an essential condition of success while looking for it was not to think of a white bear. Tolstoy's whole life may be called the hunt for the green stick of blessedness. He sought it in the transports of passion and in the thrill of the gambling table, in the vast calm and untamed grandeur of elemental nature, in the daredevil intoxication of ever-present death and in the hardening of the soul through war, in the serene joys of a happy family life, in the glowing sense of ever-growing literary fame, social prestige, power.
of wealth: ever insatiate and never satisfied. When he had seemingly scaled the heights of human ambition, he recoiled from life: the height on which he stood was the brink of an abyss.

The more he saw of life, the more he thought, the less satisfied he became. "What is the meaning of it all?" he kept asking himself. He had six thousand desyatines of land in the government of Samara, and three hundred horses. Suppose he had sixty thousand desyatines, and as many horses: what then? He was a famous writer. But suppose he became still more famous, more famous than Gogol, than Pushkin, Shakespeare, Molière, than any writer in the world: what then? What was it all about? Why should he, Count Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, with his thousands of acres, horses, healthy, rich, respected, admired, loved, possessing all that men desire; why should he be living at all? "Is there any meaning in my life," he asked, "which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me? . . . I felt that the ground on which I stood was crumbling, that there was nothing for me to stand on, that what I had been living for was nothing, that I had no reason for living."

The problem is radical enough, and Tolstoy's solution of it was as bold and radical. The enlightened men of his own class seemed to be in the dark as far as the question of ultimate values and lasting satisfaction was concerned, so he turned to the peasants, amazed for the first time in his life by the idea that, despite their poverty and ignorance, they lived contentedly on their bread and onions. There must be a real meaning in life, he thought, and in their humble way they must know this meaning. The peasants told him to live according to Christ's law, and in all sincerity Tolstoy tried to find this law in the gospels. His discoveries were
revolutionary. He found in the Sermon on the Mount five commandments, like five signposts pointing him to solid ground out of his spiritual quagmires.

Jesus condemned murderous anger and contumely, and preached considerate and generous respect of man for man. Jesus branded sensuality, veiled or unveiled, the flagrant or the contemplated degradation of woman to serve as a mere instrument of lust. Jesus denounced the willing surrender of a man's free conscience to his official superiors implied in the taking of military or bureaucratic oaths of unquestioning obedience. Jesus tore down the barriers separating one nation from another, and applied the moral law to international relations: not merely love your neighbor but love your enemy, the alien, love all mankind. And fifthly, in a commandment which Tolstoy regarded as the keystone of his moral edifice, Jesus condemned unreservedly the use of force and the law of retribution, and preached the law of love, non-resistance. Tolstoy observed that these commandments of Jesus ran, not only counter to the general practice of society, but in some cases also counter to the avowed principles on which the social order rested. The search for spiritual peace had sent him to the Gospels, and what he learned there involved him in a radical critique of the life and of the fundamental ideas of modern civilization.

The root of evil, Tolstoy declared, is selfish exploitation of man by man. This lust for self-assertion and self-gratification, sexual, economic, political, social, intellectual, taints the entire system of so-called civilized life. We imprison or exile or kill those whom we have not reformed or who have not reformed us. We employ the best years of a nation's manhood in the training of men to kill other men similarly trained. We hold sacrosanct an economic system in which one man luxuriates while and often just because a hundred
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starve. We condone lust, glorify it in literature and provide for it in practice, whether in the form of regulated or unregulated prostitution or in the less candid form of unstable pretended marriages. At the basis of our systems of law and public security is hatred masked as righteous indignation, and the spirit of revenge parading as retributive justice. And we declare that philanthropy is well enough in its place, but that we must have no nonsense but force and violent compulsion, if civilization and the social order is to be maintained.

What are we to do, then? Shall we withdraw from this wicked world to live the romantic hermit life à la Rousseau, in the bosom of uncorrupted nature? Or shall we resign ourselves to the inevitable, considering that the whole system of society involves exploitation, that we cannot change the system, that our drop in the bucket doesn't make any difference one way or the other, and we should not make ourselves miserable over it? Tolstoy took a different stand, and here his integrity puts Rousseau to shame. Rousseau's attack on civilization is largely an apology for his own life. Society is to blame, not he. Even in his Confessions Rousseau challenges mankind to show a better man than himself. He saw himself as a victim, never as a villain; even his remorse over his vices only illustrates the wretchedness of the environment that had perverted him or hampered his true self-expression.

Tolstoy is of a different temper. He begins with himself. What is to be done, means to him: What am I, Lyof Tolstoy, to do? Here I have been writing world-famous novels, and have been portraying the tree of human life, its decayed and leafless branches, but what am I really? One of the caterpillars on the tree of human life. I criticize exploitation, and myself exploit people and live comfortably on
their daily toil. I, Lyof Tolstoy, am like a horseman who observes that the horse he rides is exhausted. What is to be done? Write fine books about tired horses; remain seated on the horse's back and philanthropically hold up the beast's head? No, but first of all get off the horse's back. Before I can honestly engage in philanthropy and undertake to relieve the sufferings of the poor, I must stop living a form of life that necessarily causes poverty in the social order. This problem, Tolstoy says, is quite simple, and is made complicated only by those who do not wish to solve it in their own lives. The Chinese say: "If there is one man idle, there is another dying of hunger." If I consume what I have not myself produced, I am simply eating the dinner which someone else has earned and doesn't get, and no amount of argument can change the ugly fact.

Here then I must start. I must make other men work for me as little as possible, and must myself work as much as possible. I can take care of my own room, I can look after my own garden, I can clean my boots, indeed, I can make my boots, I can go into the fields and by honest labor produce the equivalent of the food which I eat. And only when I have done this, my own share of the daily labor upon which the sustaining of human life depends, only then can I presume to talk of philanthropy or teaching my fellow-men or the higher life. I cannot write novels, or philosophize, or make a catalogue of a million beetles, or calculate the distances of the stars, or paint sunsets and compose symphonies, and count myself superior to the ignorant and ill-smelling peasant who in the meantime has been feeding me, or worse yet, who has been producing the bread which I eat today while I, captain of trade or finance, manipulate the market so that his bread and that of thousands of others may be gathered into my storerooms. This supposed
division of labor, Tolstoy says, is a subtle fallacy with which we seek to cover a plain and ugly fact. It is a fact that in one day or even in one hour a skillful commercial transaction may make me the legal possessor of what thousands have labored for days or months to produce. It is a fact, but it is none the less iniquitous, and the civilization that sanctions it has not been touched with the true spirit of Christ. And the alleged superiority and dignity of mental work is subject to a similar criticism. Why am I the choice beneficiary of the social order? Because of my supposed high order of intelligence, because of my genius? But in that case I should be able to see more clearly than others this real truth of human life, and seeing it should mend my life accordingly. The maximum time that I can spend in really profitable mental work, that is work vigorous and not detrimental to mind or body, is five hours daily. I sleep eight hours. What do I do with the eleven hours that remain? Let me spend part of that time in relieving the peasant in his manual labor, so that he may have a chance to think at least half an hour.

But you say that modern civilized life is too complicated to allow of such transformation? So much the worse for civilized life, then. This gaudy edifice of culture does not atone for the misery of millions on which it rests, nor is it worth the human price which its elegant beneficiaries pay for it. "The greater part of my life and yours is taken up with satisfying, not our natural wants, but wants invented by us, or artificially inoculated by our education, and that have become habitual to us; and nine tenths of the work which we devote to satisfying these demands is idle work." So Tolstoy condemned the powers of darkness within us: violence, arrogance, lust, desire to oppress, exploitation. He saw these as it were inextricably bound up with modern
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civilization. To rid human life of them he was prepared to sacrifice civilization. And he conceived of another social order in which men labored in the spirit of brotherhood, each doing his share, each freely bringing to mankind his peculiar gift of intelligence or intense, exquisite feeling or spiritual genius. In this social order of Tolstoy’s vision, agriculture, industry, and trade involved no exploitation; science and philosophy truly enlightened human life; art was not aristocratic and exclusive, but rather perfected the universal communion of men in the direct language of feeling; and religion, instead of chaining men to stony creeds and wooden ritual, knit men together in living brotherhood, entered the human soul and opened its windows to admit the sunlight of God.

We need not waste time criticizing the details of Tolstoy’s own practice as a reformer, but remember his words written to Engelhardt in 1882, words which he could have written with even stronger conviction twenty-five years later: “People say to me, ‘Well, Lyof Nikolaevitch, as far as preaching goes, you preach; but how about your practice?’ The question is a perfectly natural one; it is always put to me, and it always shuts my mouth. . . . Condemn me, if you choose,—but condemn me, and not the path which I am following. . . . If I know the road home, and if I go along it drunk, and staggering from side to side, does that prove that the road is not the right one? . . . Do not yourselves confuse and mislead me, and then rejoice over it and cry, ‘Look at him! He says he is going home, and he is floundering into the swamp!’ . . . My heart is breaking with despair because we have all lost the road; and while I struggle with all my strength to find it, and keep in it, you, instead of pitying me when I go astray, cry triumphantly, ‘See! He is in the swamp with us!’ ”
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If we are candid, we are bound to admit the evils in our modern civilized society which Tolstoy so vividly exposes to view. But before we can pass judgment on his remedies, the conclusions of his diagnosis must be estimated. Because the evils which Tolstoy combats are so largely evils of civilized life, does it follow that civilization as such is an evil, and that moral progress and cultural progress conflict essentially and all along the line?

Our age burns incense on the altars of progress, but is getting decidedly dubious regarding its idolatry. The rapidity with which so much of our boasted humane culture collapsed at the first impact of savage, elemental forces during the Great War: the backdown of organized labor, the ready acquiescence of academic and literary leadership, the prostitution of organized religion in the service of international slaughter, the diabolical application of the latest science and the most expert technology to the perfecting of engines of war, particularly in the use of poison gases, the extension of hostilities to the submarine and air-regions, increasingly dangerous to numberless non-combatants, and the cynical humiliation to which the noblest purposes of man were subjected by the turn of international politics after the conclusion of the proclaimed War to End War: all these have made many men draw back in dismay, distrusting the Goddess Civilization, and doubting the stability and the essential soundness of the whole structure of Western Culture.

This confirmed or incipient social pessimism is not without grounds; these last years have served only to exhibit more obviously the seamy underside of the outwardly resplendent cloak of modern civilization. In our modern age we have perfected technical skill beyond the wildest dreams of the past, have harnessed nature to do our bidding, have almost
abolished time and space; but have we become spiritually cosmopolitan, citizens of the cosmos? Have we, in transcending the provincial boundaries of our material environment, transcended and overcome likewise spiritual provincialism? In the amazing perfection of our means of communication, have we perfected correspondingly our sense of ultimate direction? We move much faster; do we know any more clearly whither we are going, the nature of our journey or our destination? We can share our ideas so much more readily and universally: that is, share them with eye and ear; but what is the final meaning of what we have to say to each other? Is it not one of the deplorable aspects of our modern civilization that spiritual culture has lagged behind material progress, that we see all about us veriest apes of the spirit manipulating the latest devices of applied science, as if the jungle itself were equipped with wireless and radio for the broadcasting of simian wisdom?

Let us ask, then: Does the disdain of civilization rest on a sound diagnosis, and are Rousseau's or Tolstoy's proposed remedies really appropriate? Civilization does involve perversion and corruption of human life, but is it only or essentially corruption and perversion that it involves? Is civilization adequately defined as perversion and corruption? Rousseau, Tolstoy, and other social pessimists condemn the cultural process because of the evils in which it is entangled. This condemnatory verdict is a wholesome shock to rouse man from the slumber of cultural complacency, but it is none the less one-sided. A more careful insight into the relation of civilization to morality and perfection generally discloses the deeper truth as lying between the two shallower extremes of complacency and despair. This deeper truth we may formulate as follows: the advance of civilization does not involve the perfection nor yet the
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perversion of human nature; that is to say, neither one of these two to the exclusion of the other. What we call the advance of civilization is rather the spread of the field on which human aims are pursued, realized, or frustrated: a spread and an intensification, enhancement of all available values, positive and negative. Civilization is a great opportunity, but it is also a grave hazard: in its advance man learns how high he can rise, but also how low he can fall.

This essential truth may be examined and exhibited in detail in every field of human endeavor. The more complex our civilization, the more varied, the subtler, the more momentous become both attainment and frustration, whether moral, intellectual, æsthetic, or religious. Read and reinterpret the decalogue in terms of modern civilized experience. "Thou shall not kill—shalt not steal—shalt not covet:" observe the almost measureless expanse of range alike in vice and in opposite virtue here. These commandments have mellowed, enriched in meaning; they are much more difficult to fulfill than in primitive life, but the virtues they inculcate are also loftier and richer. Consider justice or brotherhood, and see the sweep in range of meaning in them as a result of civilization. In the realm of science the same results obtain. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and still more dangerous is much knowledge: dangerous in its disturbing of traditional stolidity, dangerous in its being misapprehended and misapplied, a sword double-edged in possibly foolish hands. Shall we say then: Blessed are the ignorant, or repeat the words of Dostoyevsky: "In Germany everyone can read and write, but everyone is stupid," implying presumably the rare wisdom of the illiterate Russian peasant? Intellectual progress is an opportunity and a hazard, even in purely intellectual terms: every solution only serves to give rise to still vaster problems, in which the
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chance of greater truth is confronted with the chance of more serious error, truth and error alike increasingly fundamental. So in art: success and failure alike are in the beginner elementary, but in the work of the master both are complex and grave: a child’s house of blocks compared with a Gothic cathedral, a primitive woman’s crooning against a Beethoven symphony. So even more truly is it in religion. Man’s idea of God gains in significance, but also in complexity. Piety in civilized life may be more profound, but it is likewise immeasurably more difficult than in primitive religion.

This view of human life cannot be described either as optimistic or as pessimistic. Dispiriting to the laggard, it is a challenge inspiring to the heroic in human nature. The parable of the servant who hid the single talent entrusted to him may here be adapted to our purpose. Spiritual life is a venture in values: to him that hath shall be given: this is the promise to the aspiring; but from him that hath not even that which he hath shall be taken away: this is the censure of the slothful and stagnating. And the old stories of Prometheus and the Garden of Eden may now be seen in a somewhat new light. The uprising of man from the so-called state of nature to the level of civilization is both tragic and sublime. The tree of knowledge is the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil: eating of it cost man his primitive paradisiacal innocence, and it was his first sin and guilt, and made man’s life a tragic enterprise; but it also made him a traveler on the road of real moral attainment and moral dignity: deliberate, aspiring, heroic. Not in the unruffled innocence of Paradise, but in the storm and stress of spiritual endeavor is man’s real, living perfection to be sought. “The best world for a moral
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agent,” Royce told us, “is one that needs him to make it better.”

Man’s true path upward is not in negating civilization, not in utopian simplification of modern life, though Tolstoy is to be honored for having pointed out how much larger a share of homely self-reliance is possible for man even in the present highly specialized social order. Tolstoy himself did not utterly fail to recognize that evil is not to be remedied simply by a change of environment or reorganization of the social structure, but through a personal reformation of one’s own life in the social system in which one lives, a system, however, which must never be allowed to overawe the individual’s conscience. The problem which modern society presents to the alert individual conscience is this: how may I participate in this complex life of civilization, yet in and through it contribute to the attainment of ever more adequate fair play, economic and social and international and inter-racial justice? Tolstoy even in his ploughing and cobbbling was still Tolstoy, but how are those millions for whom ploughing or cobbbling, those for whom factory, shop or store, is the day’s work, how are they to find in the vast complex social enterprise of modern civilization, in which they must participate, meaning and satisfaction and stimulus, sweetness and light? This is a fundamental problem of modern civilization, but this problem is not solved by the utopian proposal to reject culture and seek perfection in peasant or in primitive conditions of life. In saying this I do not for one moment seek to dismiss the truth, so forcibly uttered by Tolstoy, that the callous exploitation of man by man is essentially vicious, and that morality demands respect for the spiritual dignity of our fellowmen and wholehearted participation in the work and in the larger life of mankind. But the attainment of this goal demands, not the
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cultural impoverishment of humanity, but rather the spiritual and moral enrichment of our cultural inheritance.

This treatment of the particular problem of social and cultural pessimism suggests some of the more ultimate issues in which the entire problem of value, good and evil, is involved, and the conclusions which appear as reasonable. It may perhaps be of interest to mention some of these conclusions briefly, partly by way of summary and more by way of prospectus. Without much argument, I simply propose the following theses:

The world-order is a hierarchy or scale of activities, involving contact and conflict of higher and lower stages of being, the scale itself pointing from mechanism to life, to consciousness and value, from unconscious and non-rational to self-conscious and rational activity, from process in conformity to law to action on principle and in pursuit of ideal goals. That the higher activities are not as common as the lower is an observation neither surprising nor relevant: the apex of the pyramid is not any the less the apex because it covers less area than the base.

In this gradation of activities, the self-maintenance of the higher and its reaching out to ever fuller realization and self-elevation is progress, whether cosmic, or biologic, or human. The down-pulling incursion of the lower against the higher is manifold evil, and if successful on the human level involves the agent in varieties of vice; the successful resistance of man to this baser invasion is virtue. The self-satisfaction of the finite at any stage of being, if personal, is complacency, marks stagnation, and is the sin against the Holy Ghost. The sense of inability to maintain oneself on high ground or to attain ground still higher, as it leads to the feeling that the universe is hostile or indifferent to the
attainment or enhancement of value, gives rise to a consciousness of frustration, the tragic sense of life.

Such a view of existence recognizes unflinchingly the actuality of evil, but is not on that account led to pessimistic despair. Evil is literally degradation, the surrender of the higher to the lower in the scale of being. It would be possible to develop this idea at some length, in different fields of experience. Pain and disease involve the actual or the impending and threatened disorganization and degradation of bodily structure, the breakdown of highly organized into more elementary tissue. Error and fallacy involve the failure of the mind to maintain itself on the intelligent, rational level. In the field of art, beauty is always relative to a certain development of taste and spiritual heritage and refinement. So jazz is good music—for savages, but not for the heirs of Bach and Beethoven. In the moral realm the same principle holds true. That which is natural to the beast may well be and indeed is a vice in man. In fact, the beast is never beastly; man alone can be beastly. Beastliness is not mere animality; it is degradation of the human to the level of the beast, a level natural to the beast but unnatural for man. The finest example of this truth in tragedy that comes to mind is in Hamlet's scene with his mother:

Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfit presentment of two brothers: . . .
This was your husband. Look you now what follows.
Here is your husband. . . . Have you eyes? . . .
. . . What Judgment

Would step from this, to this?

This is the evil: Hamlet's uncle was no possible mate for Queen Gertrude: replacing her former worthy husband by this "mildewed ear" calls virtue hypocrite:
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Takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And makes a blister there.

This idea of vice as essentially self-degradation St. Augustin has expressed in terms of profound insight which will bear repeating: "When the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil—not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked."

As long as the universe retains any character of value, this contest, contact and conflict of higher with lower, will persist, each achievement opening new prospects, imposing new duties, facing new hazards. There is a grim element in this idea; we can apply to our purpose words which Plato wrote in the Theaetetus: "Evils ... can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good." But another version of the truth, and one more inspiriting, we find on a page of Emerson's: "Within every man's thought is a higher thought: within the character he exhibits today, a higher character." Good and evil are not distinct realities, and have no status in isolation; they are always relative to each other. Evil is that ever present side or factor in the actual world, by resistance to which a worthier side reaffirms itself and in being reaffirmed becomes better. This contest is at the heart of things; it has neither beginning nor end, and it makes our world significant and stirring.

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