

# MAN AND TECHNICS

A CONTRIBUTION  
TO A PHILOSOPHY  
OF LIFE



OSWALD SPENGLER

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ARKTOS  
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition is based on the translation of *Man and Technics* that was done by Charles Francis Atkinson and published by Allen and Unwin in London and Alfred A Knopf in New York in 1932. However, Michael Putman has completely revised the translation, correcting some errors, improving the language, retranslating some passages, and putting back some words and phrases that were omitted from the original. It is our belief that the present edition comes closer to the original German.

Most of the footnotes were present in the original edition. Footnotes that have been added by me, with the assistance of Michael Putman, are so indicated.

JOHN B MORGAN  
Budapest, Hungary  
20 January 2015

# PREFACE

BY LARS HOLGER HOLM

The question of how to either play an active role in a Western tragedy entering its final act, or to lamentably perish as a passive victim of the universal mechanisation that is to be its general theme, is at the heart of the present volume by Oswald Spengler entitled *Man and Technics*, originally published in 1931. Although its message can by no means be regarded as a mere symptom of the zeitgeist, it is today, with historical hindsight, almost impossible not to read it against the background of a liberal Weimar Republic in tatters, of a crippled nation at the mercy of hordes of Bolsheviks and Nazis engaged in a life-or-death struggle; in short: of a German Reich descending into the vortex of financial, cultural and spiritual disaster.

The early 1930s saw the consolidation of totalitarian regimes in many European countries, not just Germany. Liberal democracy had all but succumbed. In France, which was seemingly inoculated against fascism by a series of socialist revolutions, the dark shadow of political terror was looming on the horizon. Even the birthplace of the European parliament, England, was made politically uneasy by the marching boots of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. In Russia there was Stalin. For that matter, some of the measures in Roosevelt's New Deal were also totalitarian, for example his Executive Order 1062 which instigated the confiscation, at an artificially low fixed rate, of all privately-held gold in the United States. For more than a decade there had in addition been a ban on alcohol throughout the entire country.

Artistically speaking the times, particularly in Germany, were saturated with a darkly-coloured Expressionism dominating art, photography, film, literature, and music. Although Spengler always insisted on regarding art in the era of *civilisation* — in Spengler's particular vocabulary this term signified the

inescapable end of any superior culture allowed to run its natural course — as a contradiction in terms, his own combination of succinct cultural analysis with dreamlike, visionary, even mystical, ideas unmistakably bears the hallmark of an Expressionism characteristic of such diverse creations as the *Metropolis* of Fritz Lang, the sordid darkness of Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, the erotic angst of Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, and the pent-up fury in a stormy seascape by Emil Nolde. Dark indeed was the zeitgeist, the belief in Western civilisation as such having been shattered in its fundamentals. In artistically sensitive people such as Oswald Spengler, the nightmarish aspect of contemporary civilisation was about to become a reality, as horrifying as it was irrefutable.

The tragedy Spengler prophetically anticipates is thus the same as the one outlined in his primary work, *The Decline of the West*,<sup>[1]</sup> only the tones and shades now used to fill in the contours have deepened. At stake is the accumulated historical consequence of the Will to Power inherent in the demonic Nordic-Faustian mentality since the early days of the Viking explorations, the Christian Crusades, and the construction of immense cathedrals in medieval times. The last metamorphosis of this long historical process is the technology of the machine that prepares the world's nations for a final battle for financial and political world hegemony, whereby the Faustian spirit will in the end annihilate itself and turn into yet another historical fossil. But it was Spengler's firm belief that the Europe and America of his day had so far only begun to mobilise for the final battle, and that anyone who wanted to give the gods a helping hand on the day of Ragnarok should hasten to prepare himself for what must necessarily come to pass.

In 1936 Oswald Spengler, the philosopher of Occidental doom, passed away during the dress rehearsal for the Second World War known as the Spanish Civil War, which was essentially a Nazi-Bolshevik proxy war. Spengler had never liked Hitler and Hitler never liked him. But although it is certain that he would never

have endorsed Hitler's eugenics and anti-Semitism, the subsequent World War nevertheless would have confirmed in him the conviction that the curtain to the fifth and concluding act of the European tragedy had indeed been raised. It is no coincidence that the concluding words of *Man and Technics* convey the image of a Roman soldier who dies while on duty, in front of a house in Pompeii on the day of its volcanic eruption, simply because his superiors had not relieved him of duty. Whereas *The Decline of the West* still spoke of cultural death in impersonal terms, the soldier dying on duty, in a gesture of vain but unflinching steadfastness, is an image of personal, tragic fatalism. Such acts of tragic heroism were known to the Vikings as well. A passage from the *Hávamál* (Song of Odin) in the *Poetic Edda*, from a time that Spengler would describe as the early spring of Faustian culture, comes to mind: 'Cattle die, friends die, and you yourself die. One thing I know of that never dies: the reputation of a dead man.' In 1931 the only hope Spengler saw for Anglo-European civilisation was for its proponents to dutifully remain at the post where Destiny had placed them, regardless of the outcome of their efforts.

Though Spengler's cultural pessimism in general seems to have deepened during the years preceding Hitler's rise to power in 1933, he nonetheless retained his sensitivity to philosophical nuances and fine distinctions. Before arriving at his final definition of industrial technology and its ominous historical mission — more than implying that, in its grip, we are all children of Sisyphus — Spengler opens his argument by demonstrating that what we today call technology, with all its specialised and machine-based applications, is a development of something that is common to all living beings on the planet: *technique*. Technique is not a thing, nor even a procedure, but the way any individual, animal or human, asserts and adapts itself to a given situation. There is just as much specific technique involved when a human plays the violin as when a lion stalks, attacks, and finally rends its prey. However, Spengler is not suggesting that the lion could play the

violin if he wanted, or that the violinist could take down a zebra with his bare hands. The essential difference is that whereas the technique of the violinist is something that an individual acquires, that of the lion belongs to the species of lions as a whole. But regardless of whether it is an attribute of an individual or something that pertains to the entire species, technique is not a thing, but a living activity. Understanding the evolution of different techniques is thus to understand the evolution of various forms of animal and human activities in their specific environments.

Spengler's notions of people, ethnicity, race, and nobility run along the same meandering lines. Race (*Rasse*) cannot be deduced from a static relationship between one part of the skeleton to another — hence the futility of phrenology. It is rather the ensemble of *living* movements, physical as well as spiritual in the case of humans, which make up the total being — the Germans sometimes call it a *gestalt* — which bears witness to the racial aspects and cultural dignity of a creature. At the apogee of human development stands the human thoroughbred — *der Rassemensch* — a species that has existed in all higher civilisations. It follows that there are, or have been, among Asians, Africans, pre-Columbian Americans, Jews, and Arabs the same, significant hierarchical differences between the culturally creative, and thereby historically important, individuals, and the general population, as among the races and peoples of Europe and the United States. It is interesting to note that the Anglo-Saxon thinker who corresponds to Spengler, the British philosopher of history Arnold Toynbee, likewise insists in his magnum opus, *A Study of History*, on regarding the work of creative minorities, in more or less direct opposition to the spiritual inertia of the masses, as the impetus to higher civilisation in any given cultural context. The access of the masses to culture is by way of *mimesis* (imitation) of the cultural role models and ideals propagated by the few.

Whereas the superior human being in bygone times could have been an artist or a religious leader, Spengler underscores that in our present civilisation it is the grand entrepreneurs, the inventors, and the engineers of an immensely complex technical system in the making who will be able to claim this distinction. John D Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and J P Morgan in the United States and Alfred Krupp in Germany were to him emblematic figures, symbolising the coldly calculating rationality and organisational powers of modern, thoroughly urbanised *Rassemenschen*, perfectly adapted to the soulless industrial demands of their era. Likewise a single Nikola Tesla or Thomas Edison rages light years above thousands of contemporary intellectuals and artists.

Spengler's admiration for these kinds of people, however, is not tantamount to an unreserved, and at bottom unphilosophical, adulation of grand-scale capitalism for its own sake. In his scheme a person like Henry Ford is to modern civilisation what Pharaoh Cheops was to early Egyptian culture: a person capable of applying the relevant technique and vast labour organisation to immense and hitherto unimaginable projects. Hence the importance such grand-scale operations have for the spiritual symbolism of a particular culture. It follows from Spengler's definition of work, technique, and organisation that individuals capable of harnessing others for their own grandiose purposes, and of organising them in relation to cultural goals of lasting importance, are the true leaders of humanity, swaying the masses, preachers, and politicians to their tunes. The work of such men, more spiritual than physical in nature, is incommensurable with the many hands it employs. They are the humans who have brought civilisations to their peaks. And in the realm of statesmanship, eminently falling under the category of great organisers, the Athenian Solon had — if I may freely paraphrase Spengler — his modern counterpart in Bismarck.

Spengler is aware that the modern industrial leaders are largely resented, even hated, by the masses and their spokesmen in the press and political bodies. But in

his ears their objections ring hollow, since the worker would have been unable to achieve any improvement of his social status, standard of living, or purchasing power whatsoever without the invention and capitalisation of industry brought about by these entrepreneurs. The incomparable living standard of the individual Western worker is in fact a direct result of that very same large-scale industry which also involves a ruthless exploitation of natural and human resources in other parts of the world. Although it would be cynical to imply that Spengler was personally insensitive to the suffering of men and women in the former European colonies, the concept of *Ausbeutung* (exploitation) plays a very important part in his philosophy, aspiring to be sceptical and value-neutral. It is also in perfect harmony with his thesis that man in his spiritual essence is a predator — the *Rassemensch* superlatively so.

The hoofed grass-eater has no focal point in front of himself, but the lion has one, and this gives him an objective, a goal that he can pursue with single-minded determination. Likewise the human being can focus on objects at a great distance, and his coming into existence as a *Homo faber* — that is, as a human being capable of both producing and using tools — is concomitant with the appearance of the human hand: as soon as the hand (as opposed to the claw, hoof, or wing) existed, the tool also existed, and man began to rise above all the other predators on Earth to finally dominate them all by virtue of his newly-discovered spiritual powers. At that moment in cosmic time, the vision of the predator was married to the work of the skilled hand. This was the moment in which history, and thereby destiny, manifested itself on Earth.

By describing history as the result of a hidden yet active *destiny*, Spengler posited an invisible spiritual agent behind the palpable patterns of civilisation. This makes his model for historical prediction very different from Marx's, for example, based as it is on a concept of history as a linear development dictated by universal economic laws. For a start, Spengler rejects the philosophical

materialism at the root of Marxist theory. Second, he repudiates the idea of a single historical context to which we all belong in equal degree: there have already been many different cultures on Earth, and there might yet be countless others to come. Whatever form human culture assumes it will be understandable and meaningful only through the general phenomenology of culture and history as it pertains to a certain kind of human being at a specific time and place. Third, history is as much a part of nature as any other phenomenon on Earth; in fact, the units responsible for the formation of history, the different *cultures*, are organisms, or at least structurally comparable to such. Fourth, Spengler's concept of time is directly opposed to the Judeo-Christian notion of linear progression. If anything, his notion of time is of an ancient, pagan origin, suggesting a compelling *correspondence* between the circular processes of natural creation (for example, seasonal change) and those of its man-made counterpart: culture.

Yet, although culture and history are indeed the matrix through which human consciousness attains its specific form, this form does not emanate from man alone. Rather it is the distinctive, yet mysterious and original, way in which *nature* operates in and through the human mind. In other words: what we call history is the specific form in which the cycles of nature are acted out in man-made form. A quote from Goethe comes to mind as particularly illustrative: 'Colour is a law of nature in relation with the sense of sight.'<sup>[2]</sup> By analogy we might say with Spengler that culture is a law of nature in relation with human *minds* (the plural is an important qualification here).

As a subject of history, man develops both according to patterns of natural evolution and to those of his own creation. However, since man is a creature of an organic universe already in existence, he cannot escape the principles inherent in this same universe. Instead he is bound to repeat them in forms congenial with his own nature. The outer traces left behind by this continuous human creation is what Spengler calls history, whereby a culture — eventually evolving into its

petrified final stage, namely a civilisation — is the unique form in which *a certain variety of the species man* manifests itself, unfolding the potential of his own, and only his own, particular organic essence.

Though the concept of an *individual cultural destiny* thus acquires a metaphysical status in Spengler's philosophy of history, he nonetheless remains intractable as to its meaning, or rather lack thereof, refusing to admit a single rationally intelligible (or divine) intention behind this universal Will to Power and the endless struggles it entails. Instead he adopts the position taken by Nietzsche in regard to the spectacle of history: it lacks intrinsic meaning, and the gods are indifferent to the fate of man, forcing him to seek to overcome them and in the end replace them with the image of himself. According to Nietzsche, the ancient Greeks were the first people to fully realise the implication of the demise of the gods, namely that man's predicament on Earth was at bottom inscrutable and hopeless, and that his fragile act of protest could have but one sublimation: tragedy.

Spengler was profoundly inspired by Nietzsche's conception of tragedy as a gradual unveiling of a pitiless destiny indifferent to the suffering of the individual. He applied and modified it to suit his own intimation of a meta-historical intellect, incarnate in the artist-philosopher of a late civilisation, who was capable for the first time in history of regarding and understanding human civilisations as symbols of a ceaseless struggle for political and cultural supremacy within an organically limited timespan. It is also in the context of Nietzsche's Greek-inspired thoughts on the human condition that one must situate Spengler's insistence that man indeed has a free will but, in actuality, no choice. Rather: there is a choice, but whereas the one alternative culminates in tragedy — taken to mean the necessity of the individual to sacrifice whatever anachronistic personal ideal and goal he still entertains on the altar of civilisation — the other might provide the individual with some degree of comfort and protection, but

only at the cost of rendering him historically irrelevant. In this way history, always written by the victors, becomes the ultimate yardstick by which any individual human life is measured and ascribed its relative importance, now and in the future.

It goes without saying that such a solemn and fatalistic definition of the meaning of life, politically as well as spiritually, is diametrically opposed to the hedonistic social ideal propagated by utilitarian Anglo-Saxon philosophers from Adam Smith onwards: 'A maximum of happiness for a maximum of people', as one infamous dictum goes. To Spengler this kind of British pragmatism serves as one of many examples of the urban spirit in the age of civilisation: fast, intelligent, atheistic, superficial, emotionally trivial, and undignified. To counteract this liberal ideology aiming at the democratisation of the masses and their constant infatuation with entertainment and the pleasures of the flesh, Spengler invokes the archetype of the Classical hero, albeit in the guise of modern technology. Here again we find him in diametrical opposition to Marx, who insisted that history will come to an end the day mankind ceases to dress up in historical costumes and reenact its primordial myths. Marx's analyses in this respect gave birth to the modern concept of the 'end of history', discussed and adapted to contemporary conditions by liberal authors of the late twentieth century such as Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. In Spengler's view, on the contrary, there will only be humans as long as there is history. When this ceases to be written, humans as cultural beings will also disappear, since myth and mythmaking are at the core of human spirituality, and hence of history as well.

In his 1920 essay, 'Prussianism and Socialism',<sup>♦</sup> Spengler did indeed outline a model for a (German) national socialism based on the corporatist and protectionist political ideals dear to many French and German politicians, both now and then. But, with his confirmed belief in the necessity of recruiting an aristocracy of intelligence and industrial expediency from beyond the narrow

confinements of any particular ethnicity, he was never able to convince the Nazis of his own intellectual usefulness to the rejuvenated nation. A quote from his book, *The Reconstruction of the German Reich* (1922),<sup>[3]</sup> famously challenges the racism of Alfred Rosenberg and the other proponents of Nazi eugenics head-on: ‘The important thing is not long skulls but what is in them.’ To Spengler, the prerequisite for a national renaissance was the recruitment of the best brains by the state and industry, not the strongest legs. The political Left, he says, always had the sharper pens on their side. For an anti-Marxist movement to ever become politically successful it must mobilise not only the masses, but also skilled writers capable of convincingly formulating a new ideal in harmony with the prevailing zeitgeist.

In *Man and Technics*, published more than 80 years ago, Spengler nonetheless forcefully anticipated the *cultural catastrophe* (in his own words) which indiscriminate immigration to the West of what he calls *die Farbigen* (the coloured, in which category he includes practically all peoples of non-European extraction) would bring about. But even here his argument differs from standard ‘prejudice’. The cause he identifies as the beginning of the end for Faustian man is the export and sale, not of his industrial products to emerging economies, but of his industrial know-how. This would best have been kept a secret to prevent the multitudes of the Third and Fourth worlds from mounting a rebellion against the peoples of the West, allowing them to infiltrate their societies and, in the end, completely dominating them.

Spengler would return to this theme more comprehensively in his 1933 treatise *The Hour of Decision*.<sup>[4]</sup> While its analysis is more elaborate and substantiated with facts, his conclusion and admonitions nonetheless remain the same:

The great historical question is whether the fall of the white powers will be brought about or not. And on this point the overwhelming unity of resolve that

has formed itself may well give us something to think about. What resources of spiritual and material power can the white world really muster against this menace?<sup>[5]</sup>

The era of industrial technology and its manifold applications represented to Spengler a majestic culmination of the Faustian mentality which he would have rather seen go down with raised flags than with a whimper. Anybody can learn to use industrial technology, he claims, but it is an irresistible inner necessity for Faustian man. Whether this is true or not remains an open question. Industry and finance have long since left the interests of the Western nation-states behind to seek profits wherever they can. Their agendas are indifferent to creed and country and their loyalty is only to their shareholders, whom they are obligated to please by constantly increasing not only their profits but also the rate at which this profit increases. The coloured world is still, to a very large extent, at the mercy of these multinational corporations headed by international boards. Faustian technology is ubiquitous on our planet, and we can be reasonably sure that even if Faustian man, for some unforeseen reason, would let go of it, the Russians, the Jews, and the Asians will not. So what kind of distinction is Spengler really trying to make here?

Seen against the background of his ontological premise — namely, that cultures are organisms animated by unique souls — the emphasis he puts on Western man and his responsibility in the era of mechanised industry can only be properly understood as the existential duty of the Nordic-Faustian man to hang on to civilisation at all costs, even if it means that he will have to pay for this act of stubborn loyalty by sacrificing his own soul. This is also the turning point in the tragedy of Faustian man, and a *peripeteia* which affects the sensitive and enlightened human being in a much deeper and painful way than the average

man, since deep down the former feels the despair of having been condemned to cultural and spiritual death while his heart is still beating.

Through technological extension, the human hand is today reaching out even beyond the stars, towards that curtain of radiation which shrouds the mysterious birth of our universe. If the desire to know what that curtain is made of, and even to peer behind it, is not Faustian, then I don't know what would be; and I can very well imagine that if Faustian man were to go extinct, that particular question would go with him.

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[1] The Decline of the West, 2 vols. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926/1928). –Ed.

[2] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's Theory of Colours (London: John Murray, 1840), p. xl. –Ed.

[3] Neubau des Deutschen Reiches (Munich: C H Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922). No English translation exists. –Ed.

[4] The Hour of Decision (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934). –Ed.

[5] The Hour of Decision, p. 218. –Ed.

# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the following pages I lay before the reader a few thoughts that are taken from a larger work on which I have been engaged for years. It had been my intention to use the same method which in *The Decline of the West* I had limited to the group of the higher cultures, for the investigation of their historical prerequisite — namely, *the history of Man from his origins*. But experience with the earlier work showed that the majority of readers are not in a position to maintain a general view over the mass of ideas as a whole, and so lose themselves in the detail of this or that domain which is familiar to them, seeing the rest either obliquely or not at all. In consequence they obtain an incorrect picture, both of what I have written and of the subject matter about which I wrote. Now, as then, it is my conviction that the destiny of Man can only be understood by dealing with *all* the provinces of his activity *simultaneously and comparatively*, and avoiding the mistake of trying to elucidate some problem, say, of his politics or his religion or his art, solely in terms of particular *sides* of his being, in the belief that, this done, there is no more to be said. Nevertheless, in this book I venture to put forward a small number of questions which are interconnected, and therefore suited to give the reader a provisional glimpse into the great secret of Man's destiny.

# I. TECHNICS AS THE TACTICS OF LIVING

## 1

The problem of technics and its relation to culture and to history first emerges in the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century, with its fundamental scepticism — a doubt that was tantamount to despair — had posed the question of the meaning and value of *culture*; a question that led to further, ever more subversive questions and so laid the foundations for the possibility today, in the twentieth century, of seeing world history itself as a problem.

The eighteenth century, the age of Robinson<sup>[1]</sup> and Rousseau, of the English park and of pastoral poetry, had regarded 'primordial' Man himself as a sort of lamb of the pastures, a peaceful and virtuous creature who would only later be corrupted by culture. The technical side of him was completely overlooked, and in any case considered unworthy of consideration compared with considerations of moral issues.

But after Napoleon the machine-technics of Western Europe grew gigantic and, with its manufacturing towns, its railways, its steamships, it has forced us in the end to face the problem in earnest. What is the significance of technics? What meaning within history or value within life does it possess? What moral and metaphysical dimensions does it have? Many answers were given, but ultimately they are reducible to two.

On the one side there were the idealists and ideologues, the belated stragglers of the humanistic Classicism of Goethe's age, who generally regarded technical matters and economic issues as separate from culture and *beneath* it. Goethe, with his grand sense of all things real, had attempted to probe this new fact-world to its deepest depths in the second part of *Faust*. But even in Wilhelm von

Humboldt<sup>[2]</sup> we have the beginnings of that anti-realist, philological outlook upon history which ultimately judges the value of a historical epoch in terms of the number of the paintings and books that it produced. A ruler was regarded as a significant figure only insofar as he proved himself to have been a patron of learning and the arts — what he was in other respects did not count. The state was a constant intrusion upon the true culture that was pursued in lecture halls, scholars' dens, and studios. War was an unlikely relic of the barbarism of past times; the economy was something prosaic, stupid, and beneath notice, although one made daily demands upon it. To mention a great merchant or a great engineer in the same breath with poets and thinkers was almost an act of *lèse-majesté*<sup>[3]</sup> to 'true' culture. Consider, for instance, Jakob Burckhardt's<sup>[4]</sup> *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*<sup>[5]</sup> — the outlook is typical of that of most classroom philosophers (and many historians, for that matter), just as it is the outlook of those literates and aesthetes of today who view the production of a novel as something more important than the manufacture of an aircraft engine.

On the other hand there was a materialism of an essentially English provenance which was the fashion among the half-educated during the latter half of the nineteenth century, of liberal culture pages and radical popular assemblies, of Marxist and social-ethical writers who fancied themselves thinkers and poets.

If the characteristic of the first class was a lack of a sense of reality, that of the second was a devastating shallowness. Its ideal was *utility*, and utility only. Whatever was useful to 'humanity' was a legitimate element of culture, **was** in fact culture. The rest was luxury, superstition, or barbarism.

Utility meant what was conducive to the 'happiness of the majority', and this happiness consisted of leisure. This is in the final analysis the doctrine of Bentham,<sup>[6]</sup> Mill,<sup>[7]</sup> and Spencer.<sup>[8]</sup> The aim of mankind was held to consist in relieving the individual of as much of the work as possible and putting the burden

on the Machine. Freedom from the ‘misery of wage-slavery’, equality in amusements and comforts, and ‘enjoyment of art’ — thus do the *panem et circenses*<sup>[9]</sup> of the cosmopolitan cities of the Late periods announce themselves. The progress-philistine became excited over every button that set an apparatus in motion for the — supposed — sparing of human labour. In the place of the authentic religion of earlier times came a shallow enthusiasm for the ‘achievements of humanity’, by which nothing more was meant than progress in the technics of labour-saving and amusement-making. Of the soul, not one word was discussed.

That is not at all to the taste of the great inventors themselves (with few exceptions), and also not to that of people who really understand technical problems. It is that of their *spectators* who, themselves incapable of inventing or understanding anything, nevertheless sense that there is something interesting going on. And with the complete lack of imagination that is the hallmark of materialism in every civilisation, there is formed a vision of the future in which the ultimate object and the final permanent condition of humanity is an Earthly Paradise conceived in terms of the technical trends of, say, the eighties of last century — a rather startling negation, by the way, of the very concept of progress, which by definition excludes permanent conditions. Thus we have books like Strauss’<sup>[10]</sup> *Alte und Neue Glaube*,<sup>[11]</sup> Bellamy’s<sup>[12]</sup> *Looking Backward*,<sup>[13]</sup> and Bebel’s<sup>[14]</sup> *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*.<sup>[15]</sup> No more war; no more distinctions between races, peoples, states, or religions; no criminals or adventurers; no conflicts arising out of superiorities and differences, no hate or vengeance anymore, but eternal comfort throughout the millennia. Even today, when we experience the last phases of this trivial optimism, these idiocies make one shudder, thinking of the appalling boredom — the *taedium vitae*<sup>[16]</sup> of the Roman Imperial age — that spreads over the soul in the mere reading of such

idylls, of which even a partial actualisation in real life could only lead to wholesale murder and suicide.

Today both views are obsolete. The twentieth century has at last reached the maturity to penetrate the inner meaning of the facts which collectively comprise *genuine world history*. Interpreting facts and events is no longer a matter of the private tastes of individuals or of the masses, a rationalistic *tendency*, or of one's own hopes and desires. The place of 'it shall be so' and 'it ought to be so' is taken by the inexorable 'it *is* so', 'it *will* be so'. A proud scepticism displaces the sentimentalities of last century. We have learned that history is something that takes no notice whatever of our expectations.

The physiognomic tact — as I have called it<sup>[17]</sup> — the quality which alone enables us to probe the meaning of all events, the insight of Goethe and of every born connoisseur of men and life and history throughout the ages — reveals the deeper significance of particular phenomena.

## 2

If we are to understand the essence of technics, we must not start from the technics of the Machine age, and still less from the misleading notion that the fashioning of machines and tools is the *goal* of technics.

For, in reality, technics is ancient, and moreover it is not something historically specific, but something overwhelmingly general. It extends far beyond mankind, back into the life of the animals — indeed of *all* animals. In contrast to plant life, animals are capable of moving about freely and possesses some measure, great or small, of self-will and independence from Nature considered as a whole. Accordingly, in possessing these, it is obliged to maintain itself against Nature and to give its own being some sort of a significance, some sort of identity, and some sort of a superiority. Thus the significance of technics may only be seen in terms of the *soul*.

For the free-moving life of the animal<sup>[18]</sup> is struggle, and nothing but struggle, and it is the *tactics* of its living, its superiority or inferiority in face of 'the other' (whether that 'other' be animate or inanimate Nature), which decides the *history* of this life, which settles whether its fate is to suffer the history of others or to be itself their history. *Technics is the tactics of all life*. It is the inner form of the *process* utilised in that struggle which is identical with life itself.

This is the second error that has to be avoided here: *Technics is not to be understood in terms of tools*. What matters is not how one fashions things, *but the process of using them*; not the weapon, but the battle. Modern warfare, in which the decisive element is tactics — that is, the technique of running the war, the techniques of inventing, producing, and handling the weapons being only items in the process as a whole — points to a general truth. There are innumerable techniques in which no tools are used at all: that of a lion outwitting a gazelle, for instance, or that of diplomacy. Or, again, the technics of administration, which consists in keeping the state in a proper form for the struggles of political history. There are processes of gas and chemical warfare. Every struggle to overcome a problem has its own logical technique. There is a technique of the painter's brush-strokes, of horsemanship, of navigating an airship. Always it is a matter of *purposive activity*, never of *things*. And it is just this that is so often overlooked in the study of prehistory, in which far too much attention is paid to things in museums and far too little to the innumerable processes that must have been in existence, even though they may have vanished without leaving a trace.

Every machine *serves* some one process and owes its existence to *thought about this process*. All our means of transport have developed out of the *ideas* of driving and rowing, sailing and flying, and not out of any concept such as that of a wagon or of a boat. Methods themselves are weapons. And

consequently technics is in no wise a 'part' of economics, any more than economics (or, for that matter, war or politics) can claim to be a self-contained 'part' of life. They are all just *sides of one active, fighting, and charged life*. Nevertheless, a path does lead from the primeval warring of extinct beasts to the processes of modern inventors and engineers, and likewise there is a path from the trick, oldest of all weapons, to the design of the machines with which today we make war on Nature by outmanoeuvring her.

One calls this Progress. This was the great catchword of last century. Men saw history before them like a street on which, bravely and ever forward, marched 'mankind' — essentially meaning by that term the white races, or more exactly the inhabitants of their great cities, or more exactly still the 'educated' amongst them.

But whither? For how long? *And what then?*

It was a little ridiculous, this march into the endless future, towards a goal which men did not seriously conceive or dare to visualise clearly. For by definition a goal is an end. No one does anything without thinking of the moment when he shall have attained that which he willed. No one starts a war, or a goes to sea, or even takes a walk without thinking of its duration and its ending. Every truly creative human being knows and fears the *emptiness* that follows upon the fulfilment of a work.

To development belongs fulfilment — every development has a beginning, and every fulfilment is an end. To youth belongs age; to arising, passing; to life, death. For the animal, tied in the nature of its thinking to the present, death is known or scented as something in the future, something unthreatening. It only knows the fear of death in the moment of being killed. But man, whose thought is emancipated from the fetters of here and now, yesterday and tomorrow, boldly investigates the 'once' of past and future, and so knows that death is coming. It depends on the depth of his nature and on his worldview as to whether he triumphs over this fear of the end or not. An ancient Greek legend (presupposed

by the *Iliad*) tells how his mother put before Achilles the choice of whether he wanted a long life, or a short life full of deeds and fame, and how he chose the second.

Man was, and is, too shallow and cowardly to endure the fact of the *mortality* of everything living. He wraps it up in the rose-coloured optimism of Progress (which no one actually believes in), he masks it with literature, he crawls behind the shelter of ideals so as not to see anything. But impermanence, birth and passing, is the *form of all that is actual* — from the stars, whose destiny is for us incalculable, right down to the fleeting concourses on this planet. The life of the individual — whether animal or plant or man — is as perishable as that of peoples of cultures. Every creation succumbs to decay; every thought, every discovery, every deed to oblivion. All around us we sense traces of lost courses of history that ended in some great doom. All around us the ruins of the past works of dead cultures lie before our eyes. The hubris of Prometheus, who thrust his hand into the heavens in order to cast down the divine powers to mankind, brings with it its own fall. What, then, is our prating about the ‘everlasting achievements of mankind’ supposed to mean?

World history appears very differently from that which even our own age allows itself to dream. The history of Man is brief in comparison with that of the plant and animal worlds on this planet, to say nothing of the lifespans of the celestial realms. It is a steep ascent and fall, covering a few millennia, a period negligible in the history of the Earth but, for us who are born with it, full of tragic grandeur and force. And we, human beings of the twentieth century, go downhill *seeing*. Our regard for history, our faculty of writing history, is a revealing sign that our path lies downward. Only at the peaks of the high cultures, just as they are passing over into Civilisations, does this gift of penetrating recognition come to them for a moment.

In and of itself the destiny of this small planet that pursues its course somewhere in infinite space for a short time among the swarms of the ‘eternal’ stars is of no importance. Still less important is what moves for a couple of instants upon its surface. But each and every one of us, in and of ourselves of no importance, is for an unspeakably brief moment — a lifetime — cast into that whirling universe. And so for us this world-in-little, this ‘world history’, is of the utmost importance. And, what is more, the *destiny* of each of these individuals consists in his being, by birth, not merely brought into this world history, but brought into it in a particular century, a particular country, a particular people, a particular religion, a particular class. It is *not* within our power to choose whether we would like to be sons of an Egyptian peasant of 3000 BC, of a Persian king, or of a present-day tramp. This destiny is something to which we have to adapt ourselves. It *condemns* us to certain situations, views, and actions. There are no ‘men-in-themselves’ such as the philosophers prattle about, but only men of a time, of a locality, of a race, of a personality type, who contend in battle with a *given* world and win through or fail, while the universe around them moves slowly on with a godlike unconcern. This battle is life, and life in the true Nietzschean sense of a cruel, pitiless, relentless battle deriving from the Will to Power.

[1] As in Robinson Crusoe. –Ed.

[2] Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) was a Prussian philosopher who was charged with reforming the Prussian public educational system, which he did by instituting standardisation across all schools. –Ed.

[3] A French term denoting an insult against the dignity of a person or institution. –Ed.

[4] Jakob Burckhardt (1818–1897) was an important German historian and historiographer who specialised in the Renaissance, and art history in particular. Nietzsche studied under him. –Ed.

[5] Judgments on History and Historians (London: Routledge, 2007).

[6] Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was a British philosopher who was the founder of the utilitarian school of philosophy. –Ed.

[7] John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a British philosopher and exponent of utilitarianism who was crucial in the development of liberal political theory. –Ed.

[8] Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was a British philosopher who applied the theory of evolution to politics and sociology, coining the concept of the ‘survival of the fittest’. –Ed.

[9] Latin: ‘bread and circuses’. –Ed.

- [10] David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) was a controversial German theologian who denied the divinity of Christ, giving rise to the concept of the ‘historical Jesus’. –Ed.
- [11] *The Old Faith and the New* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997). In this book Strauss rejected religion in its entirety, as he came to see it as being supplanted by science and technology. –Ed.
- [12] Edward Bellamy (1850–1898) was an American socialist writer. –Ed.
- [13] *Looking Backward* is about a man who is put into a hypnotic sleep in the year 1887 and then awakens in the year 2000 to discover that the United States has been transformed into a socialist utopia. –Ed.
- [14] August Bebel (1840–1913) was a German socialist politician who was the leader of the Social Democrats. He was a strong proponent of social, racial, and sexual equality. –Ed.
- [15] *Woman Under Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971). In it, Bebel called for the abolition of the institution of marriage and monogamous relationships. –Ed.
- [16] Latin: ‘ennui of existence’. –Ed.
- [17] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, p. 100.
- [18] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, p. 3.

## II. HERBIVORES AND BEASTS OF PREY

### 3

*Man is a beast of prey.* Acute thinkers, like Montaigne and Nietzsche, have always known this. The life wisdom in the old fairy-tales and proverbs of all peasant and nomad folk; the smiling penetration characteristic of the great connoisseur of men, whether statesman or general, merchant or judge, at the apex of a rich life; the despair of the world-improver who has failed; the invective of the angered priest — none of these even come close to wanting to deny or conceal this fact. Only the grave solemnity of idealist philosophers and other theologians has lacked the courage to be open about what their hearts knew perfectly well: ideals are cowardice. Yet, even from the works of these one could assemble a pretty collection of opinions that they have from time to time let slip concerning the beast in man.

Today we must definitely settle accounts with this view. Scepticism, the last remaining philosophical attitude that is possible for (indeed, that is *worthy of*) this age, allows no such evasion of issues. Yet, for this very reason, neither would I leave unchallenged other views that have been developed out of the natural science of last century. Our *anatomical* treatment and classification of the animal world is (as is to be expected from its origin) dominated entirely by the materialist outlook. Granted that the picture of the body, as it presents itself to the human (and only to the human) eye, and *a fortiori* that of the body as dissected and chemically treated and experimentally maltreated, eventuates in a system — the system founded by Linnaeus<sup>[1]</sup> and deepened in its paleological aspect by the Darwinian school — a system of static and optically appreciable details, yet after all there *is* another, a quite other and unsystematic, ordering

according to species of *life*, which is revealed only through unsophisticated living with it, through the inwardly felt relationship of *ego* and *tu*,<sup>[2]</sup> which is known to every peasant, but also to every true artist and poet. I love to meditate upon the physiognomic<sup>[3]</sup> of the kinds of animal *living*, the kinds of animal *soul*, leaving the systematic of bodily structure to the zoologists. For thereupon a wholly different *hierarchy*, one of life and not of body, discloses itself.

A plant lives, although only in the restricted sense a living being.<sup>[4]</sup> Actually there is life *in it*, or about it. 'It' breathes, 'it' feeds, 'it' multiplies, we say, but in reality it is merely the *theatre* of processes that form one unity along with the processes of the natural environment, such as day and night, sunshine and soil-fermentation, so that the plant itself cannot will or choose. Everything takes place with it and in it. It selects neither its position, nor its nourishment, nor the other plants with which it produces its offspring. It does not move itself, but is moved by wind and warmth and light.

Above this grade of life now rises the freely mobile life of the animals. But of this there are *two stages*. There is one kind, represented in every anatomical genus from unicellular animals to aquatic birds and ungulates, whose living depends for its maintenance upon the *immobile* plant-world, for plants cannot flee or defend themselves. But above this there is a second kind, which lives on other animals and *whose living consists of killing*. Here the prey is itself mobile, and highly so, and moreover it is combative and well-equipped with dodges of all sorts. This second kind is also found in all the genera of the system. Every drop of water is a battlefield and we, who have the land-battle so constantly before our eyes that it is taken for granted or even forgotten, shudder to see how the fantastic forms of the deep sea carry on the life of killing and being killed.

*The animal of prey is the highest form of mobile life.* It implies a maximum of freedom from others and for oneself, of self-responsibility, of

independence, and an extreme of necessity where that self can hold its own only by *fighting and winning and destroying*. It imparts a high dignity to Man, as a type, that he is a beast of prey.

A herbivore is by its destiny a *prey*, and it seeks to avoid this destiny by escaping without combat, but beasts of prey must *get* prey. The one type of life is of its innermost essence defensive, the other offensive, hard, cruel, destructive. The difference appears even in the tactics of movement — on the one hand the habit of retreating, fleetness, cutting of corners, evasion, concealment, and on the other the *straight-line* motion of the attack, the lion's spring, the eagle's swoop. There are dodges and counter-dodges alike in the style of the strong and in that of the weak. Cleverness in the human sense, *active* cleverness, belongs only to beasts of prey. Herbivores are by comparison stupid, and not merely the 'innocent' dove and the elephant, but even the noblest sorts like the bull, the horse, and the deer; only in blind rage or sexual excitement are these capable of fighting; otherwise they will allow themselves to be tamed, and a child can lead them.

Besides these differences in kind of motion, there are others, still more effective, in the organs of sense. For these are accompanied by differences in the manner of sensing, of having, a 'world'. In itself every being lives in Nature, in an environment, irrespective of whether it notices this environment, or is noticeable in it, or neither. But it is the manner of relation — a manner that is mysterious and inexplicable by any human reasoning — established between animal and environment by touching, ordering, and understanding, which creates out of the total environment a particular perceptual world for each animal. The higher herbivores are ruled by the ear, but above all by *scent*;<sup>[5]</sup> the higher carnivores on the other hand *rule with the eye*. Scent is the characteristically defensive sense. The nose catches the point of origin and the distance of danger and so gives the movement of one's flight the appropriate direction, *away from* something.

But the eye of the preying animal gives a *target*. The very fact that, in the great carnivores as in man, the two eyes can be fixed on one point in the environment enables the animal to bind its prey. In that hostile glare there is already implicit for the victim the doom that it cannot escape, the pounce that is instantly to follow. But this act of fixation by two eyes disposed forward and parallel is equivalent to the birth *of the world*, in the sense that Man possesses it — that is, as a picture, as a world before the eyes, as a world not merely of lights and colours, but of perspective distance, of space and motions in space, and of objects situated at definite points. This way of seeing which all the higher carnivores possess — in herbivores, e.g. ungulates, the eyes are set sideways, each giving a different and non-perspective impression — implies in itself the notion of *commanding*. The world-picture is the environment as *commanded* by the eyes. The eye of the beast of prey determines things according to position and distance. It apprehends the horizon. It measures up in this *battlefield* the objects and conditions of attack. Sniffing and spying, the way of the hind and the way of the falcon, are related as slavery and dominance. There is an infinite sense of power in this quiet wide-angle vision, a feeling of freedom that has its source in *superiority*, and its foundations in the knowledge of greater strength and consequent certainty of being no one's prey. The *world* is the prey, and in the last analysis it is owing to this fact that human culture has come into existence.

And, lastly, this fact of an innate superiority has become intensified, not only outwards, with respect to the light-world and its endless distances, but also inwards, as regards the sort of soul that the strong animals possess. What we men feel as the soul, both in ourselves and in others — this enigmatic something which we feel when we hear the word 'soul' used, but of which the essence baffles all science; the divine spark in this living body which in this divinely cruel, divinely indifferent world has either to rule or to submit — is the *counter-pole* of the light-world about us, and hence man's thought and feeling are quite ready

to assume the existence of a world-soul in it. The more solitary the being and the more resolute it is in forming its own world against all other conjunctures of worlds in the environment, the more definite and strong the cast of its soul. What is the opposite of the soul of a lion? The soul of a cow. For strength of individual soul the herbivores substitute numbers, the herd, a common sentiment, and group activities. But the less one needs others, the more powerful one is. A beast of prey is everyone's foe. Never does he tolerate an equal in his den. Here we are at the root of the truly royal idea of *property*. Property is the domain in which one exercises unlimited power, the power that one has gained in combat, defended against one's peers, victoriously upheld. It is not a right to mere possession, but the sovereign right to do as one wills with one's own.

Once this is understood, we see that there are carnivore and there are herbivore *ethics*. No one is in a position to change this. It is the inward form, meaning, and tactics of all life. It is simply a *fact*. We can annihilate life, but we cannot alter it in kind. A beast of prey tamed and in captivity — every zoological garden can furnish examples — is mutilated, world-sick, inwardly dead. Some of them voluntarily hunger-strike when they are captured. Herbivores give up nothing in being domesticated.

Such is the difference between the destiny of herbivores and that of the beast of prey. The one destiny only menaces, the other contributes something as well. The former depresses, makes mean and cowardly, while the latter elevates through power and victory, pride and hate. The former is a destiny that is imposed on one, the latter a destiny that is identical with oneself. And the fight of Nature-within against Nature-without is thus seen to be, not *misery*, as Schopenhauer and as Darwin's 'struggle for life' regard it, but a grand meaning that *ennobles* life, the *amor fati* of Nietzsche. And it is to this kind that Man belongs.

Man is no simpleton, 'naturally good' and stupid, and not a semi-ape with technical tendencies, as Haeckel<sup>[6]</sup> describes him and Gabriel Max<sup>[7]</sup> portrays him. <sup>[8]</sup> Over these caricatures there still falls the plebeian shadow of Rousseau. No, the tactics of his living are those of a splendid beast of prey, brave, crafty, and cruel. He lives by attacking and killing and destroying. He wills, and has willed ever since he existed, to be master.

Does this mean, however, that technics is actually older than man? Certainly not. There is a vast difference between Man and all other animals. The technique of the latter is a *generic technique*. It is neither inventive nor capable of development. The bee type, ever since it existed, has built its honeycombs exactly as it does now, and will continue to build them in such a way until it is extinct. They belong to it as the form of its wing and the colouring of its body belong to it. Distinctions between bodily structure and way of life are only anatomists' distinctions; if we start from the inner form of the life instead of that of the body, tactics of living and the organisation of the body appear as one and the same, both being expressions of *one* organic actuality. 'Genus' is a form, not of the visible and static, but of mobility — a form, not of so-being, but of so-doing. Bodily form is the form of the *active* body.

Bees, termites, and beavers all build wonderful structures. Ants know agriculture, the construction of roads, slavery, and the management of war. Nursing, fortification, and organised migration are found widely spread. All that Man can do, one or another sort of animal has achieved. Free-moving life in general contains tendencies that exist, dormant, as *potentialities*. Man achieves nothing that is not achievable by *life as a whole*.

And yet — all this has at bottom nothing whatever to do with human technics. This generic technique is *unalterable*; that is what the word 'instinct' means. Animal 'thought', being strictly connected with the immediate here-and-now and knowing neither past nor future, knows also neither experience nor

anxiety. It is not true that the female animal ‘cares’ for her young. Care is a feeling that presupposes mental vision into the future, concern for what *is to be*, just as regret presupposes knowledge of what *was*. An animal can neither hate nor despair. Its nursing activity is, like everything else mentioned above, a dark unconscious response to impulse such as is found in many types of life. It is a property of the species and not of the individual. Generic technique is not merely unalterable, but also *impersonal*.

The unique fact about human technics, on the contrary, is that it is *independent* of the life of the human genus. It is the one instance in all the history of life in which the individual frees himself from the compulsion of the genus. One has to meditate long upon this thought if one is to grasp its immense implications. Technics in man’s life is conscious, arbitrary, alterable, personal, *inventive*. It is learned and improved. Man has become the *creator* of his tactics of living — that is his grandeur and his doom. And the inner form of this creativeness we call culture — to be cultured, to cultivate, to suffer from culture. A man’s creations are the expression of this being in *personal* form.

- [1] Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) was a Swedish botanist and zoologist who created the system of binomial nomenclature which is used for classifying and naming species. –Ed.
- [2] Latin for ‘I’ and ‘you’. –Ed.
- [3] The Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 99–103.
- [4] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 3 et seq.
- [5] Jakob von Uexküll, *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (Munich: F Bruckmann, 1913), pp. 67 et. seq. (Von Uexküll [1864–1944] was a Baltic German biologist who coined the term *umwelt* [roughly, environment] to describe this concept of a specific perceptual world for each species. An organism’s *umwelt* is comprised of its *innenwelt*, which is the way in which it perceives itself, and its *umgebung*, which is the particular way in which it perceives the surrounding outside world. His ideas have been influential on philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, among others. –Ed.)
- [6] Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) was a German biologist who introduced Darwin’s ideas into Germany. –Ed.
- [7] Gabriel von Max (1840–1915) was an Austrian painter who was interested in Darwinian theory, and who had a fondness for monkeys; in fact he lived with many at his home. In his paintings he frequently ascribed human characteristics to monkeys. –Ed.
- [8] It is only the simple anatomists’ rage for systematic classification that has brought Man close to the apes; moreover, even by them it is today coming to be regarded as an overhasty and shallow conclusion; see, for instance, Klaatsch, himself a Darwinian (*Der Werdegang der Menschheit*, 1920 [The Evolution and Progress of Mankind (London: T F Unwin, 1923)]), pp. 29 et seq. For in the very ‘system’ itself Man stands off the line and outside all ordering — very primitive in many parts of his bodily structure and freakish in others. But that does not concern us here. It is his life we are studying, and in his destiny, his soul, he is an animal of prey.

# III. THE ORIGIN OF MAN: HAND AND TOOL

## 5

Since when has this type of the *inventive carnivore* existed? Or, since this amounts to the same thing, since when have there been men? What is man? And how did he come to be man?

The answer is — through the development of the hand. Here is a weapon unparalleled in the world of free-moving life. Compare with it the paw, the beak, the horns, teeth, and tail-fins of other creatures. To begin with, the sense of touch is concentrated in it to such a degree that it can almost be called the organ of touch, in the sense that the eye is the organ of vision, and the ear of hearing. It distinguishes not only hot and cold, solid and liquid, hard and soft, but, above all, weight, form, and position of resistances, and so on — in short, *things in space*. But, over and above this function, the *activity* of living is gathered into it so completely that the whole bearing and allure of the body has — simultaneously — taken shape in accordance with it. There is nothing in the whole world that can be compared to this member, equally capable of touch and action. To the eye of the beast of prey which commands the world ‘theoretically’ is added the hand of Man which commands it *practically*.

Its origin must have been *sudden*; in terms of the tempo of cosmic currents it must have happened, like everything else that is decisive in world history (epoch-making, in the highest sense), as abruptly as a flash of lightning or an earthquake. Here again we have to emancipate ourselves from the nineteenth-century idea, based on Lyell’s<sup>[1]</sup> geological researches, of an ‘evolutionary’ process. Such a slow, phlegmatic alteration is truly appropriate to the English nature, but it does not represent Nature. To support the theory, since measurable periods of time give

evidence of no such process, one makes conjectures about periods of millions of years. But in truth we cannot distinguish geological strata unless *catastrophes* of unknown kinds and causes have separated them for us, nor yet species of fossil creatures unless they appear suddenly and hold on unaltered until their extinction. Of the ‘ancestors’ of Man we know nothing, in spite of all our research and comparative anatomy. The human skeleton has been, ever since it appeared, just what it is now — one can observe even the Neanderthal type in any public gathering. It is impossible, therefore, that hand, upright gait, the position of the head, and so forth should have developed successively and independently. The whole thing is suddenly there in its entirety.<sup>[2]</sup> World history strides on from catastrophe to catastrophe, whether we can comprehend and prove the fact or not. Nowadays, since de Vries,<sup>[3]</sup> we call it mutation. It is an inner change that suddenly seized all specimens of genus, of course ‘without rhyme or reason,’ like everything else in actuality. It is the mysterious rhythm of the real.

Further, not only must man’s hand, gait, and posture have come into existence together, but — and this is a point that no one hitherto has observed — *hand and tool* also. The unarmed hand is in itself useless. It requires a weapon to become a weapon itself. As the implements took form from the shape of the hand, so also the *hand from the shape of the tool*. It is meaningless to attempt to divide the two chronologically. It is impossible that the formed hand was active, even for a short time, without the implement. The earliest remains of Man and of his tools are equally old.

What has divided, however — not chronologically, but logically — is the technical *process*, so that the making and the using of the tool are different things. As there is a technique for making violins and another for playing violins, so there is a technique of shipbuilding and another of sailing, and of the bowyer’s craft and the archer’s skill. No other preying animal even *selects* its weapon, but Man not only selects it, but makes it, and according to his own individual ideas.

And with this he obtains a terrific superiority in the struggle with his own kind, with other beasts, and with Nature.

*This is what constitutes his liberation from the compulsion of the genus*, a phenomenon unique in the history of all life on this planet. With this, Man *comes into being*. He has made his active life to a large extent free of the conditions of his body. The genus-instinct still perseveres in full strength, but the individual's thoughts and thoughtful activities have detached themselves from its bonds. This freedom consists in freedom of choice. Everyone makes his own weapon, according to his own skill and his own reasoning. The many discoveries of failed and discarded pieces still testify to the effort of this initial 'thinking-doing'.

If, nevertheless, these pieces are so similar that one can — though with doubtful justification — distinguish 'cultures' such as the Acheulean and the Solutrean, and even postulate parallels from the same time period across all the five continents from this (although this is certainly without justification), the explanation lies in the fact that this liberation from the compulsion of the genus only emanated at first as a grand *possibility* and fell far short of any actualised individualism. No one likes to pose as a freak, nor on the other hand merely to imitate another. In fact, everyone thinks and works for himself, but the life of the genus is so powerful that in spite of this the product is everywhere similar — as it is, at bottom, even today.

Therefore, besides the 'thought of the eye', the comprehending and keen glance of the great beasts of prey, we have now the 'thought of the hand'. From the former in the meantime has developed that thought which is theoretical, observant, contemplative — our 'reflection' and 'wisdom' — and now from the latter comes the practical, active thought, our 'cunning' and 'intelligence' proper. The eye seeks out cause and effect; the hand works on the principle of means and end. The question of whether something is suitable or unsuitable — the criterion

of the *doer* — has nothing to do with that of true and false, the values of the *observer*. And an aim is a *fact*, while a connection of cause and effect is a *truth*.

[4] In this wise arose the very different modes of thought of the truth-men — the priest, the scholar, and the philosopher — and the fact-men — the statesman, the general, and the merchant. Ever since then, even today, the commanding, directing, clenching hand is the expression of a will, so much so that we actually have a graphology and a palmistry, not to mention figures of speech such as the ‘heavy hand’ of the conqueror, the ‘dexterity’ of the financier, and the ‘hand’ revealed in the work of a criminal or an artist.

With his hand, his weapon, and his personal thinking Man became *creative*. All that animals do remains inside the limits of the activity of their genus and does not enrich their life. Man, however, the creative animal, has spread such a wealth of inventive thought and action all over the world that he seems perfectly entitled to call *his* brief history ‘world history’ and to regard his surroundings as ‘humanity’, with all the rest of Nature as a background, an object, and a means.

The act of the thinking hand we call a *deed*. There is already activity in the existence of the animals, but deeds begin only with Man. Nothing is more enlightening in this connection than the story of fire. Man *sees* (cause and effect) how a fire starts, and so also do many of the beasts. But Man alone (end and means) *thinks out* a process for starting it. No other act so impresses us with the sense of creation as this one. It is the deed of Prometheus. One of the most uncanny, violent, enigmatic phenomena of Nature — lightning, forest fire, volcano — is henceforth called into life by Man himself, *against* Nature. What it must have been to man’s soul, that first sight of a fire evoked by himself!

Under the tremendous impression of this free and conscious *individual act*, which thus emerges from the uniformity of the impulsive and collective activity of the genus, the genuine human soul now develops into a very solitary being (even as compared with those of the other beasts of prey) with the proud and pensive look of one knowing his own destiny, with an unrestrained sense of power in the fist habituated to deeds, a foe to everyone, killing, *hating*, resolved to conquer or die. This soul is profounder and more passionate than that of any animal whatsoever. It stands in irreconcilable opposition to the whole world, from which its own creativeness has separated it. It is the soul of a rebel.

Earliest Man settled alone like a bird of prey. If several 'families' drew together into a pack, it was a pack of the loosest sort. As yet there was no thought of tribes, let alone peoples. The pack is a chance assembly of a few males, who for once do not fight one another, along with their women and the children of their women, without communal feeling and wholly free. They are not a 'we' like the mere herd of specimens of a genus.

The soul of these strong loners is warlike through and through, mistrustful, and jealous of its own power and booty. It knows the pathos not only of the 'I' but also of the 'mine'. It knows the intoxication of feeling when the knife pierces the hostile body, and the smell of blood and the sense of amazement strike together upon the exultant soul. Every real 'man', even in the cities of Late periods in the cultures, feels in himself the sleeping fires of this primitive soul from time to time. There is nothing here of the pitiful estimation of things as 'useful' or 'labour-saving', and less still of the toothless feeling of sympathy, reconciliation, and yearning for quiet. But instead of these what was felt was the full pride of knowing oneself feared, admired, and hated for one's fortune and strength, and the urge to vengeance upon all, whether living beings or things, that constitute, if only by their mere existence, a threat to this pride.

This soul strides forward in an ever-increasing alienation from *all* Nature. The weapons of the beasts of prey are natural, but the armed fist of Man with its artificially made, thought-out, and selected weapon is not. *Here begins 'Art' as a counter-concept to 'Nature'*. Every technical process of Man is an art and is always so described — so, for instance, the arts of archery and horsemanship; the art of war; the arts of building and government; of sacrificing and prophesying; of painting and versification; of scientific experiment. Every work of Man is artificial and unnatural, from the lighting of a fire to the achievements that are specifically designated as 'artistic' in the high cultures. The privilege of creation has been wrested from Nature. 'Free will' itself is an act of rebellion and nothing less. Creative Man has stepped outside the bounds of Nature, and with every fresh creation he departs further and further from her, becoming more and more her enemy. *That* is his 'world history', the history of a steadily increasing, fateful rift between man's world and the universe — the history of a rebel that grows up to raise his hand against his mother.

This is the beginning of man's *tragedy* — for Nature is the stronger of the two. Man remains dependent on her, for in spite of everything she embraces him, like all else, within herself. All the great cultures are just so many *defeats*. Whole races remain, inwardly destroyed and broken, fallen into barrenness and spiritual decay, as corpses on the field. The fight against Nature is hopeless and yet — it will be fought out to the bitter end.

[1] Charles Lyell (1797–1875) was a British geologist who first postulated that the geological processes which shaped the Earth's surface are the same that are at work today, and thus could be understood as a continuous process. –Ed.

[2] As to this 'evolution' in general — the Darwinians say that the possession of so admirable a weapon favoured and preserved the species in the struggle for existence. But for the weapon to confer an advantage it must first be ready, and the unfinished weapon would be a useless burden, and so a positive disadvantage, during the course of its evolution — an evolution which, be it noted, has to be regarded as taking thousands of years. And how, is it imagined, did the process start? It is somewhat imbecile to hunt down causes and effects, which after all are forms of man's thinking and not of the world's becoming, in the hope of penetrating the secrets of that world.

[3] Hugo de Vries, *The Mutation Theory* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1910). (Hugo de Vries [1848–1935] was a Dutch botanist and one of the first geneticists, who postulated that evolution could occur as a result of mutations across generations. –Ed.)

[4] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, pp. 141 et seq.; vol. 2, pp. 212 et seq.

## IV. THE SECOND STAGE: SPEECH AND ENTERPRISE

### 7

How long the age of the armed hand lasted — that is, since when has Man been Man — we do not know. In any case the number of years does not matter, although today we still set it far too high. It is not a matter of millions of years, nor even of several hundreds of thousands. Nevertheless a considerable number of millennia must have flowed away.

But now comes a second epoch-making change, as abrupt and immense as the first, and like it transforming man's destiny from the foundations — once more a true 'mutation' in the sense indicated above. Prehistoric archaeology observed this long ago, and in fact the things that lie in our museums do suddenly begin to look different. Clay vessels appear, and traces of 'agriculture' and 'cattle-breeding' (though this is a rash use of terms that connote something much more modern), hut-building, and graves, as well as indications of travel. A new world of technical ideas and processes sets in. The museum standpoint, which is far too superficial and obsessed with the mere ordering of finds, has differentiated older and newer Stone Ages: the Palaeolithic and Neolithic. This nineteenth-century classification has long been regarded with uncomfortable doubts, and in the last few decades attempts have been made to replace it with something else. But scholars are still sticking to the idea of classifying *objects* (as terms like Mesolithic, Miolithic, and Mixolithic indicate) and hence they are getting no further. What changed was, not equipment, but *Man*. Once more, it is only from his soul that Man's history can be discovered.

The date of this mutation can be fixed with fair accuracy as being somewhere in the fifth millennium before Christ.<sup>[1]</sup> Two thousand years later at most, the high cultures are beginning in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Truly the tempo of history is working up tragically. Hitherto thousands of years have scarcely mattered at all, but now every century becomes important. With tearing leaps, the rolling stone is approaching the abyss.

But what in fact has happened? If one goes more deeply into this new world of forms in man's activities, one soon perceives the most bizarre and complicated interconnections. These techniques, one and all, presuppose one another's existence. The keeping of tame animals demands the cultivation of forage stuffs, the sowing and reaping of plants for food requires draught animals and beasts of burden to be available, and these, again, the construction of pens. Every sort of building requires the preparation and transport of materials, and transport, again, requires roads, pack animals and boats.

What in all this is the *spiritual* transformation? The answer I put forward is this — *collective doing by plan*. Hitherto each man had lived his own life, made his own weapons, and followed his own tactics in the daily struggle. None needed another. This is what suddenly changes now. The new processes take up long periods of time, in some cases years — consider for instance the time that elapses between the felling of a tree and the sailing of the ship that is built out of it. The story divides itself into a set of well-arranged separate 'acts' and a set of 'plots' working out in parallel with one another. And for this collective procedure the indispensable prerequisite is a medium, *language*.

Speaking in sentences and words, therefore, cannot have begun either earlier or later, but must have come just then — quickly, like everything decisive, and, moreover, in close connection with man's new methods. This can be proved.

What is 'speaking'?<sup>[2]</sup> Indubitably it is a process having for its object the imparting of information, an activity that is practised continuously by a number

of human beings amongst themselves. 'Speech' or 'language' is only an abstraction from this, the inner (grammatical) form of speaking, and therewith of words. This form must be common property and must have a certain permanence if information is really to be imparted by its means. I have elsewhere<sup>[3]</sup> shown that speaking in sentences is preceded by simpler forms of communication, such as signs for the eye, signals, gestures, and warning and threatening calls. All these continue in use, even today, as auxiliaries to speaking, as melodious speech, emphasis, in the play of one's features and hands, and (in written speech) punctuation.

Nevertheless, 'fluent' speaking is, by reason of its content, something quite new. Ever since Hamann<sup>[4]</sup> and Herder,<sup>[5]</sup> men have asked themselves the question of its origin. But if all answers so far have been more or less unsatisfactory, it is because the *intention* of the question has been wrong, for the origin of speaking in words is not to be found in the activity of speaking itself. That was the error of the Romantics, who (divorced from reality, as always) deduced speech from the 'primary poetry' of mankind. Moreover, they thought that speech was itself this poetry — myth, lyric, and prayer rolled into one — and that prose was merely something that came later and was degraded for common, everyday use. But had this been so, the inner form of the speaking, the grammar, and the logical build of the sentence would have been totally different. In reality it is precisely the very primitive languages (such as those of the Bantu and Turkoman tribes) that show most emphatically the tendency to mark differences clearly, sharply, and unmistakably.<sup>[6]</sup>

This, in turn, brings us to the fundamental error of those sworn foes of Romanticism, the rationalists, who are forever chasing the idea that what the sentence expresses is a *judgement* or a *thought*. They sit at their desks, surrounded by books, and research into the minutiae of *their own* thoughts and

writings. Consequently the 'thought' appears to them as the *object* of the speaking, and (since usually they sit alone) they forget that beyond the speaking there is a hearing, beyond a question an answer, beyond an *ego* a *tu*. They say 'speech', but what they mean is the oration, the lecture, the discourse. Their view of the origin of speech is, therefore, false, for they look upon it as *monologue*.

The correct way of putting the question is not how, but *when* did speaking in words come into existence? And once the question takes this form, all very soon becomes clear. The object of speaking in sentences, usually misunderstood or ignored, is settled by the period in which it became customary to speak thus (that is, 'fluently'), and displayed quite clearly in the form of sentence-building. Speaking did not arise by way of monologue, nor sentences by way of oratory; the source is in the *conversation* of several persons. The object is not one of understanding as a consequence of reflection, but one of reciprocal understanding as a consequence of question and answer. What, then, are the basic forms of speech? Not the judgement and declaration, but the *command*, the expression of obedience, the enunciation, the question, the affirmation or negation. These are sentences, originally quite brief, which are *invariably* addressed to others, such as 'Do this!', 'Ready?', 'Yes!', and 'Go ahead!' Words as designations of notions<sup>[7]</sup> are only products of the *object* of the sentence, and hence it is that the vocabulary of a hunting tribe is from the outset different from that of a village of cowherds or a seafaring coastal population. Originally, speaking was a difficult activity,<sup>[8]</sup> and it may be assumed that it was limited to bare essentials. Even today the peasant is slow of speech as compared with the townsman — who is so accustomed to speaking that he cannot hold his tongue and must, from mere boredom, chatter and make conversation as soon as he has nothing else to do, whether he really has anything to say or not.

The original *object* of speech is the *carrying out of an act* in accordance with intention, time, place, and means. Clear and unequivocal construction is therefore the first essential component, and the difficulty of both conveying one's meaning to, and imposing one's will on, another produced the technique of grammar, sentences, and constructions, as well as the correct modes of ordering, questioning, and answering, and the building-up of classes of words — on the basis of *practical* and not theoretical intentions and purposes. The part played by theoretical reflectiveness in the beginnings of speaking in sentences was practically *nil*. All speech was of a practical nature and proceeded from the 'thought of the hand'.

## 8

A 'collective doing by plan' may be more briefly called an *enterprise*. *Speech* and *enterprise* stand in precisely the same relation to each other as the older pair *hand* and *implement*. Speaking to several people developed its inner, grammatical form in the practice of carrying out jobs, and vice versa the habit of doing jobs got its schooling from the methods of a thinking that had to work with words, for speaking consists in imparting something to another's thought. If speaking is an act, it is an *intellectual* act with *sensorial* means. Very soon it no longer needed the original immediate connection with physical doing. The epoch-making innovation of the fifth millennium BC was, in fact, that thereafter the thinking, the intellect, and the reason, specifically that which (call it by what name you please) had been emancipated by speech from dependence upon the hand proceeded to set itself up against Soul and Life *as a power in itself*. The purely intellectual thinking-over, the 'calculation', which emerges at this point — sudden, decisive, and radical — amounts to this: that collective doing is as effectively a *unit* as if it were the doing of some single giant. Or as Mephistopheles ironically says to Faust:

Suppose I buy myself six steeds:  
I buy their strength; while I recline  
I dash along at whirlwind speeds,  
For their two dozen legs are mine.<sup>[2]</sup>

Man, the carnivore, insists *consciously* on increasing his superiority far beyond the limits of his bodily powers. To this will-to-greater-power of his he even sacrifices an important element of *his own* life. The thought of, and the calculation for, greater effectiveness comes first, and for the sake of it he is quite willing to give up a little of his personal freedom. Inwardly, indeed, he remains independent. But history does not permit one step to be taken back. Time, and therefore Life, are irreversible. Once habituated to the collective doing and its successes, Man commits himself more and more deeply to its fateful implications. The enterprise in the mind requires a firmer and firmer hold on the life of the soul. Man has become the slave of his thought.

The step from the use of personal tools to the common enterprise involves an immensely increased *artificiality* of procedure. The mere working with artificial *material* (as in pottery, weaving, and matting) does not as yet mean a great deal, although even it is something much more intelligent and *creative* than anything before it. But traces have come down to us of some few processes, standing far above the many of more ordinary kinds of which today we can know nothing, which presuppose very great powers of thought indeed — above all, those which grew out of the *idea* of *building*. Long before there was any knowledge of metals, there were flint mines in Belgium, England, Austria, Sicily, and Portugal — complete with shafts and galleries, ventilation and drainage, and tools fashioned of deers' horn — which certainly go back to these times.<sup>[10]</sup> In the early Neolithic period Portugal and northwestern Spain had close relations with Brittany (bypassing southern France), and Brittany in turn with Ireland, which

presupposes regular navigation and, therefore, the building of seaworthy ships of some sort, though we know nothing about these. There are megaliths in Spain built of hewn stones of vast size, with capstones weighing more than a hundred tons, which must have been brought from great distances and placed in position somehow, though again we know nothing of the technique employed. In truth, have we any clear notion of how much thought, consultation, superintendence, and ordering was required, over months and years on end, for the quarrying and transport of this material, for the assignment of tasks in time and in space, and the planning, undertaking, and execution of such work? How much prolonged forethought is required for such transportation across the open sea in comparison with the production of a flint knife! Even the ‘composite bow’ which appears in Spanish rock-pictures of the period demands sinews, horn, and special woods for its construction, all from different sources, as well as a complicated process of manufacture that took five to seven years. And the ‘discovery’, as we so naively call it, of the wagon — how much thinking, ordering, and doing it presupposes, ranging from the determination of the purpose and kind of movement required, the choice and preparation of the *road* (a point usually ignored), and the provision or breaking-in of draught animals, to consideration of the bulk, weight, and lashing of the load, and the management and housing of the convoy!

Another and quite different world of creations arises out of the ‘thought’ of procreation — namely, the *breeding* of plants and animals, in which Man himself takes the place of Nature the creatrix, imitates her, modifies her, improves on her, and overrides her. From the time when he began *cultivating* instead of gathering plants, there is no doubt that he consciously modified them for his own ends. At any rate the specimens discovered belong to species that have never been found in a wild state. And even in the oldest finds of animal bones that indicate cattle-keeping of any sort, we perceive already the consequences of ‘domestication’, which, partly if not wholly, must have been intentional and

brought about by deliberate breeding.<sup>[11]</sup> The prey-idea of the carnivore at once widens and includes not only the slain victims of the hunt, but also the free cattle<sup>[12]</sup> that graze freely within (or even without) a man-made hedge.<sup>[13]</sup> They belong to someone — a clan, a hunting group — and the owner will fight to maintain his right of exploitation. The capture of animals for breeding purposes, which presupposes the cultivation of foodstuffs for them, is only one of many modes of possession then practised.

I have already shown that the birth of the armed hand had had as its result a *logical* separation of two techniques — namely, that of making and that of using the weapon. Similarly, the verbally managed enterprise now leads to the separation of the activities of thought from those of the hand. In every enterprise *planning out* and *carrying out* are distinct elements, and from now on practical thought henceforth takes the leading part. There is *director's work* and there is *executant's work*, and this fact has been the basic technical form of all human life ever since.<sup>[14]</sup> Whether it is a matter of hunting big game or building temples, an enterprise of war or of rural development, the founding of a firm or of a state, a caravan journey or a rebellion or even a crime — always the first prerequisite is an enterprising, inventive head to conceive the idea and direct the execution, to command and to allot the roles — in a word, someone who is born to be a leader of others who are not so.

For in this age of verbally managed enterprises there are not only two sorts of technics — these, by the way, diverging more and more definitely as the centuries go on — but also *two kinds of men*, differentiated by the fact of their talent lying in one or in the other direction. As in every process there is a technique of direction and a technique of execution, so, equally self-evidently, there are *men whose nature is to command and men whose nature is to obey, subjects and objects of the political or economic process in question.*

Such is the complicated mode of human life that has existed since this historical shift and which has assumed so many forms, and it could only be done away with at the expense of human life itself.

Admittedly this is artificial and contrary to Nature — but that is just what ‘culture’ *is*. Fate may ordain, and at times does ordain, that Man should imagine himself able to abolish it — *artificially* — but nevertheless it is unshakably a *fact*. Governing, deciding, guiding, commanding is an art, a difficult technique, and like any other it presupposes an innate talent. Only children imagine that a king goes to bed with his crown, and only sub-humans of the great cities, Marxists and the literati, imagine something similar about the leaders of the economy. Running an enterprise is *work*, and it is only as the result of that work that the manual labour became possible. Similarly the discovery, thinking out, calculation, and management of new processes is a *creative* activity of gifted heads, and the executive role falls to the uncreative as a necessary consequence. And here we meet an old friend, now a little out of date: the question of genius and talent. Genius is — literally<sup>[15]</sup> — creative power, the divine spark in the individual life that in the stream of the generations mysteriously and suddenly appears, is extinguished, and a generation later reappears with equal suddenness. Talent is a gift for particular tasks already there, which can be developed by tradition, teaching, training, and practice to high effectiveness. Talent in its exercise presupposes genius — and not *vice versa*.

Finally, there is a natural distinction of grade between men born to command and men born to service, between the leaders and the led, of *life*. The existence of this distinction is a plain *fact*, and in healthy periods and by healthy peoples it is admitted (even if unwillingly) by everyone. In the centuries of decadence the majority force themselves to deny or to ignore it, but the very insistence on the formula that ‘all men are equal’ shows that there is something here that has to be explained away.

This verbally managed enterprise involves an immense loss of freedom — the old freedom of the beast of prey — *for the leader and the led alike*. They *both* become intellectual, spiritual members of a higher unit, body and soul. This we call *organisation*, the gathering of active life into definite forms, into the condition of being ‘in form’ for the enterprise, whatever it may be. With collective doing the decisive step is taken from *organic* to *organised* existence, from living in natural to living in artificial groupings, from the pack to the people, the tribe, the social class, the state.

Out of the combats of individual carnivores there has sprung war, as an *enterprise* of tribe against tribe, with leaders and followers, with organised marches, invasions, and battles. Out of the annihilation of the conquered springs the *law* that is imposed upon the defeated. Human law is ever a law of the stronger to which the weaker must conform,<sup>[16]</sup> and this law, considered as something enduring between tribes, is ‘*peace*’. Such a peace also prevails within the tribe, so that its forces may be available for external action: *the state is the internal order of a people for its external purpose*. The state is as form, as possibility, what the history of a people is as actuality.<sup>[17]</sup> But history, of old as well as today, is the history of war. Politics is only a temporary substitute for war that uses more intellectual weapons. And the menfolk of a community are originally synonymous with its *army*. The character of the free beast of prey passes over, in its essential features, from the individual to the organised people, the animal with one soul and many hands.<sup>[18]</sup> The technics of government, war, and diplomacy all have this same root and have in all ages a profound inter-relationship with each other.

There are peoples whose strong races have retained the character of the beast of prey, rapacious, conquering, lordly, lovers of the fight against *men*, who leave

the economic fight against Nature to others, whom in due course they plunder and subject. Piracy is as old as navigation, the raiding of the trade route as old as nomadism, and wherever there is peasantry there is enslavement to a warlike nobility.

For with the organisation of enterprises comes the separation of the political and the economic sides of life, that directed towards *power* and that directed towards *booty*. We find not merely an *internal* articulation of the people according to activities — warriors and workers, chiefs and peasants — but also the organisation of whole tribes for a single economic occupation. Even then there must have been hunting, cattle-breeding, and agricultural tribes, mining, pottery, and fishing villages, political organisations of seafarers and traders — and over and above these, a conquering people *without* economic occupation at all. The harder the battle for power and booty, the closer and stricter the bonding of the individuals by law and force.

In the tribes of this primitive sort the individual life mattered little or nothing. Consider that in every sea voyage (the Icelandic sagas are illuminating here) only a proportion of the ships reached port, that in every great building task no small part of the workmen perished, that whole tribes starved in time of drought — clearly, all that mattered was that enough were left to represent the *spirit* of the whole. The numbers decreased rapidly, but what was felt as annihilation was, not the loss of one or even of many, but *the extinction of the organisation, of the 'we'*.

In this increasing interdependence lies the quiet and deep revenge of Nature upon the being that has wrested the privilege of creation from her. This petty creator *against* Nature, this revolutionary in the world of life, has become the slave of his creature. The culture, the aggregate of artificial, personal, self-made life-forms, develops into a barred cage for these souls that would not be restrained. The beast of prey, who made others his domestic animals in order to

exploit them, has taken himself captive. The great symbol of this fact is the human *house*.

Another symbol of this is his increasing numbers, in which the individual disappears as unimportant, for it is one of the most fateful consequences of the human spirit of enterprise that the population multiplies. Where once a pack of a few hundreds roamed, a people of tens of thousands now sits.<sup>[19]</sup> There are scarcely any regions empty of men. People borders on people, and the mere *fact* of the frontier — the limit of one's own power — arouses the old instincts to hate, to attack, to annihilate. The frontier, of whatever kind it may be, even the intellectual frontier, is the mortal foe of the will to power.

It is not true that human technics saves labour. For it is an essential characteristic of the personal and modifiable technics of Man, in contrast to the genus technics of animals, that every discovery contains the possibility and *necessity* of new discoveries, every fulfilled wish awakens a thousand more, every triumph over Nature incites to yet others. The soul of this beast of prey is ever hungry, his will never satisfied — that is the curse that lies upon this kind of life, but also the greatness inherent in its destiny. It is precisely its best specimens that know the least quiet, happiness, or enjoyment. And no discoverer has ever accurately foreseen the *practical* effect of his act. The more fruitful the leader's work, the greater the need of executive hands. And so, instead of killing the prisoners taken from hostile tribes, men begin to enslave them, so as to exploit their bodily strength. This is the origin of slavery, which must be precisely as old as the slavery of domestic animals.

In general, these peoples and tribes multiply, so to say, *downwards*. What grows is not the number of 'heads', but that of hands. The group of those who are leaders by nature *remains* small. It is, in fact, the pack of the true beasts of prey, the pack of the gifted who dispose, in one way or another, of the increasing *herd* of the others.

But even this lordship of the few is far removed from the ancient freedom — witness Frederick the Great's saying: 'I am the first servant of my state.' Hence the desperate efforts of the 'exceptional' man to keep himself inwardly free. Here, and only here, begins *the individualism that is a reaction against the psychology of the mass*. It is the last uprising of the carnivore soul against its captivity behind the bars of culture, the last attempt to shake off the spiritual and intellectual *limitations* that are produced by, and represented by, the fact of large numbers. Hence arise the types of life typified by the conqueror, the adventurer, the hermit, and even certain types of criminals and bohemians. The wished-for escape from absorption by the masses takes various forms — lordship over it, flight from it, contempt for it. The idea of personality, in its dark beginnings, is a protest against humanity in the mass, and the tension between these grows and grows to its tragic finale.

Hate, the most genuine of all race-feelings in the beast of prey, presupposes *respect* for the adversary. A certain recognition of like spiritual rank is inherent in it. Beings that stand lower one *despises*. Beings that themselves stand low are *envious*. All primitive folk-tales, god-myths, and hero-sagas are full of such motives. The eagle hates only his peers, envies none, despises many and indeed all. Contempt looks downwards from the heights, envy peers upwards from below — and these two are the *world-historical* feelings of mankind organised in state and classes, whose (forcedly) peaceful specimens helplessly rattle the bars of the cage in which they are confined *together*. From this fact and its consequences *nothing* can liberate them. So it was and so it will be — or nothing at all will be. It has a significance, this fact of respect and contempt. To *alter* it is impossible. The destiny of Man is pursuing its course and must accomplish itself.

[1] Based on de Geers' researches on Swedish banded clay (Max Ebert [ed.], *Realexikon der Vorgeschichte*, vol. 2 [Berlin: W de Gruyter, 1925], article 'Diluvialchronologie').

[2] See *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, chapter 5.

[3] *Ibid.*

- [4] Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) was one of the most important philosophers of the German Counter-Enlightenment and the Sturm und Drang movement. His writings are critical of reason and the ideals of the Enlightenment. –Ed.
- [5] Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was a German philosopher who argued that language determines thought, and believed that a national identity was fundamentally linked to its language. His primary work on language is *Treatise on the Origin of Language*. –Ed.
- [6] So much so that in many tongues the sentence is a single monstrous word, in which everything that is intended to be said is expressed by means of syllables of classification prefixed and suffixed according to rule.
- [7] A notion is an ordering of things, situations, and activities in classes of practical generality. The horse-breeder does not say ‘horse’, but ‘grey mare’ or ‘bay foal’; the hunter says, not ‘wild boar’, but ‘tusker’, ‘two-year-old’, or ‘shoat’.
- [8] Certainly it would only have been adults who could speak fluently, just as was the case far later on with writing.
- [9] Goethe’s *Faust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), translated by Walter Kaufmann, p. 193. –Ed.
- [10] *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte*, vol. 1, article ‘Bergbau’.
- [11] Max Hilzheimer, *Natürliche Rassengeschichte der Haussäugetiere* (Berlin & Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1926).
- [12] In the same conditions as the livestock of our woods today.
- [13] Even in the nineteenth century the Indian tribes still followed the great buffalo herds, just as the Gauchos of Argentina follow the privately owned cattle herds today. Thus, in certain cases, we find nomadism growing out of settlement and not the other way around.
- [14] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, chapter 5, sections 2 and 4.
- [15] It comes from the Latin genius, the masculine generative force.
- [16] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, pp. 64 et seq.
- [17] *Ibid.*
- [18] And, be it added, one head, not many.
- [19] Today, rather, one of millions is squeezed into this space.

# V. THE LAST ACT: RISE AND END OF THE MACHINE CULTURE

## 10

The culture of the armed hand had a strong wind behind them and got a grip on the whole genus Man. The cultures of speech and enterprise — we are at once in the plural, and several can be distinguished — in which personality and mass begin to be in spiritual opposition, in which the spirit becomes avid of power and lays violent hands on life, these cultures embraced even at their full only a *part* of mankind, and they are today, after a few millennia, all extinguished and replaced. What we call ‘natural peoples’ and ‘primitives’ are merely the remains of their living material, the ruins of forms that once were permeated with soul, cinders out of which the glow of becoming and departing has gone.

On this soil, from 3000 BC onwards, there now grew up, here and there, the *high cultures*,<sup>[1]</sup> cultures in the narrowest and grandest sense, each filling but a very small portion of the Earth’s space and each enduring for hardly a thousand years. The tempo is that of the final catastrophes. Every decade has significance, every year, almost, its special ‘look’. It is world history in the most genuine and most exacting sense. This group of passionate life-courses invented for its symbol and its ‘world’ the *city*, in contrast to the village of the previous stage — the stone city in which is housed a quite artificial living, that has become divorced from Mother Earth and is *completely* anti-natural — the city of rootless thought, that draws the streams of life from the land and uses them up within itself.<sup>[2]</sup>

There arises ‘society’<sup>[3]</sup> with its hierarchy of classes — noble, priest, and bourgeois — as an *artificial* gradation of life against the background of ‘mere’ peasantry, for the *natural* divisions are those of strong and weak, clever and stupid — and as the seat of a cultural evolution that is wholly intellectualised.

There 'luxury' and 'wealth' reign. These are concepts which those who do not share them enviously misunderstand. For what is luxury but culture in its most exacting form? Consider the Athens of Pericles, the Baghdad of Harun-al-Raschid, the Rococo. This urban culture is luxury through and through, in all grades and callings, artificial from top to bottom, an affair of arts, whether arts of diplomacy or living, of adornment or writing or thought. Without an economic wealth that is concentrated in a few hands, there can be no 'wealth' of art, of thought, or of elegance, not to speak of the luxury of possessing a worldview and of thinking theoretically instead of practically. Economic impoverishment at once brings spiritual and artistic impoverishment in its train.

And, in this sense, the technical processes that mature in these cultures are also spiritual luxuries, late, sweet, and fragile fruits of an increasing artificiality and intellectuality. They begin with the building of the tomb pyramids of Egypt and the Sumerian temple-towers of Babylonia, which come into being in the third millennium BC, deep in the south, but signify no more than the victory over big *masses*. Then come the enterprises of Chinese, Indian, Classical, Arabian, and Mexican cultures. And now, in the second millennium of our era, in the Far North, there is our own Faustian culture, which represents the victory of pure technical thought over big *problems*.

For these cultures grow up, though *independently* of one another, yet in a series of which the sense is from south to north. The Faustian, Western European culture is *probably* not the last, but *certainly* it is the most powerful, the most passionate, and — owing to the inward conflict between its comprehensive intellectuality and its profound spiritual disharmony — the most tragic of them all. It is possible that some belated straggler may follow it — for instance, a culture may arise somewhere in the plains between the Vistula and the Amur — during the next millennium. But it is here, in our own, that the struggle between

Nature and the Man whose historic destiny has made him pit himself against her is to all intents and purposes ended.

The northern countryside, by the severity of the conditions of life in it — the cold, the continuous privation — has forged hard races, with intellects sharpened to the keenest, and the cold fires of an unrestrained passion for fighting, risking, thrusting forward — that which elsewhere I have called *the Pathos of the Third Dimension*.<sup>[4]</sup> There are, once more, true beasts of prey whose inner forces struggle fruitlessly to break the superiority of thought, of organised artificial living, over the blood, to turn these into their servants, to elevate the destiny of the free personality to being the *very meaning* of the world. A will to power which laughs at all bounds of time and space, which indeed regards infinity as its specific target, subjects whole continents to itself, eventually embraces the world in the network of its forms of communication and intercourse, and *transforms* it by the force of its practical energy and the gigantic power of its technical processes.

At the beginning of every high culture the two primary orders, nobility and priesthood — the beginnings of ‘society’ — take shape clear of the peasant-life of the open land.<sup>[5]</sup> They are the embodiment of ideas, and, moreover, mutually exclusive ideas. The noble, warrior, and adventurer lives in the world of *facts*; the priest, scholar, and philosopher in his world of truths. The one is (or suffers) a *destiny*, the other thinks in *causality*. The former make intellect the servant of a strong living; the latter would subject his living to the service of the intellect. And nowhere has this opposition taken more irreconcilable forms than in the Faustian culture, in which the proud blood of the beast of prey revolts for the last time against the tyranny of pure thought. From the conflict between the ideas of Empire and Papacy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to the conflict between the forces of an aristocratic racial tradition — kingship, nobility, army

— and the theories of a plebeian rationalism, liberalism, and socialism — from the French to the German revolution — again and again the decision was sought.

## 11

This difference appears, in all its magnitude, in the contrast between the *Vikings of the blood* and the *Vikings of the mind* during the rise of the Faustian culture. The first, thrusting insatiably out from the Far North into the infinite, reached Spain in 796, the interior of Russia in 859, and Iceland in 861. In 861, too, Morocco was reached, and thence they ranged to Provence and the environs of Rome itself. In 865, by Kiev, the drive passed on to the Black Sea and Constantinople, in 880 to the Caspian, in 909 to Persia. They settled in Normandy and Iceland about 900, in Greenland about 980, and discovered North America about 1000. In 1029, from Normandy, they are in southern Italy and Sicily; in 1034, from Constantinople, they were in Greece and Asia Minor; and in 1066, from Normandy again, they conquered England.<sup>[6]</sup>

With the same boldness and the same hunger for power and booty, in this case intellectual, Northern monks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries forced their way deep into the world of technical-physical problems. Here there is nothing of the idle and unpractical curiosity of the Chinese, Indian, Classical, and Arabian savants. There is no speculative thinking done simply in order to obtain a mere theory or conception of that which Man cannot know. True, **every** scientific theory is a *myth* of the understanding about Nature's forces, and everyone is dependent, through and through, upon the religion to which it belongs.<sup>[7]</sup> But in the Faustian, and the Faustian alone, every theory is also from the outset a *working hypothesis*.<sup>[8]</sup> A working hypothesis need not be 'correct', it is only required to be practical. It aims, not at embracing and unveiling the secrets of the world, but at making them serviceable to definite ends. Hence the

advance in *mathematical* methods, due to the Englishmen Grosseteste (born 1175) and Roger Bacon (born around 1210), and the Germans Albertus Magnus (born 1193) and Witelo (born 1220). Hence, too, *experiment*, Bacon's *Scientia experimentalis*,<sup>[9]</sup> which is the interrogation of Nature under torture with the rack, lever, and screw;<sup>[10]</sup> '*experimentum enim solum certificat*',<sup>[11]</sup> as Albertus Magnus put it. It is the military stratagem of intellectual beasts of prey. They imagined that their desire was to 'know God', and yet it was the forces of *inorganic* Nature — the invisible energy manifested in all that happens — that they strove to isolate, to seize, and to turn to account. This Faustian science, and it alone, is *Dynamics*, in contrast to the Statics of the Greeks and the Alchemy of the Arabs.<sup>[12]</sup> It is concerned not with materials, but with forces. Mass itself is a function of energy. Grosseteste developed a theory of space as a function of light, Petrus Peregrinus<sup>[13]</sup> a theory of magnetism. The Copernican theory of the Earth's motion round the sun was foreshadowed in a manuscript of 1322 and then formulated — more clearly and more profoundly than by Copernicus himself — by Oresme<sup>[14]</sup> fifty years later in *De coelo et mundo*. (In the *De differentia qualitatum* Oresme also anticipated the Galileian law of falling bodies and the Cartesian coordinate geometry). God was looked upon no longer as the Lord who rules the world from His throne, but as an infinite force (already imagined as almost impersonal) that is omnipresent in the world. It was a singular form of divine worship, this experimental investigation of secret forces by pious monks. As an old German mystic said, 'In thy serving of God, God serves thee.'

Man, evidently, was tired of merely having plants and animals and slaves to serve him, and robbing Nature's treasures of metal and stone, wood and yam, of managing her water in canals and wells, of overcoming her obstacles with ships and roads, bridges and tunnels and dams. Now he meant not merely to plunder

her of her materials, *but to enslave and harness her very forces* so as to multiply his own strength. This monstrous and unparalleled idea is as old as the Faustian culture itself. Already in the tenth century we meet with technical constructions of a wholly new sort. Already the steam engine, the steamship, and the air machine are in the thoughts of Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus. And many a monk busied himself in his cell with the idea of the *Perpetuum mobile*.

[15]

This last idea never thereafter let go its hold on us, for success would mean the final victory over God or Nature — *Deus sive Natura* — a small world of one's own creation moving like the great world, in virtue of its own forces and obeying the hand of Man alone. To build a world *oneself*, to be *oneself* God — that is the Faustian inventor's dream, and from it has sprung all our designing and re-designing of machines to approximate as nearly as possible to the unattainable limit of perpetual motion. The conception of booty of the beast of prey is thought out to its logical end. Not this or that bit of the world, as when Prometheus stole fire, but the world itself, complete with its secret of force, is dragged away as spoil to be built into our culture. But he who was not himself possessed by this will to power over all Nature would necessarily feel all this as *devilish*, and in fact men have always perceived and feared machines as the invention of the devil — with Roger Bacon begins the long line of scientists who suffer as magicians and heretics.

But the history of West European technology marches on. Around 1500 a new series of Viking-like conquests begins with Vasco da Gama and Columbus. New realms are created or conquered in the East and West Indies, and a stream of Nordic blood<sup>[16]</sup> is poured out into America, where of old the Icelandic seamen had set foot in vain. At the same time the Viking voyages of the intellect continued on a grand scale. Gunpowder and printing were discovered. From Copernicus and Galileo on, technical processes followed one another thick and

fast, all with the same object of extracting the inorganic forces from the environment and making them, instead of men and animals, do the work.

With the growth of the towns, technics became *bourgeois*. The successor of those Gothic monks was the cultured lay inventor, the expert *priest of the machine*. Finally, with the coming of rationalism, the belief in technics almost becomes a materialistic religion. Technics is eternal and immortal like God the Father, it delivers mankind like God the Son, and it illumines us like God the Holy Ghost. And its worshipper is the progress-philistine of the modern age which runs from La Mettrie<sup>[17]</sup> to Lenin.

In reality the passion of the inventor has *nothing whatever* to do with its consequences. It is his *personal* motivation in life, his *personal* joy and sorrow. He wants to enjoy his triumph over difficult problems, and the wealth and fame that it brings him, for their own sake. Whether his discovery is useful or menacing, creative or distributive, he cares not a jot. Nor indeed is anyone in a position to know this in advance. The effect of a 'technical achievement of mankind' is never foreseen — and, incidentally, 'mankind' has never discovered anything whatever. Chemical discoveries like that of synthetic indigo and (what we shall presently witness) that of artificial rubber upset the living conditions of whole countries. The electrical transmission of power and the discovery of the possibilities of energy from water have depreciated the old coal areas of Europe *and their populations*. Have such considerations ever caused an inventor to suppress his discovery? Anyone who imagines this knows little of the beast-of-prey nature of man. All great discoveries and inventions spring from the delight of strong men in *victory*. They are expressions of personality and not of the utilitarian thinking of the masses, who are merely spectators of the event, but must take its consequences whatever they may be.

And these consequences are immense. The small number of born leaders, entrepreneurs and inventors, force Nature to perform work that is measured in

millions and billions of horsepower, and in face of this the quantum of man's physical powers is so small that it counts for nothing. We understand the secrets of Nature as little as ever, but we do know the working hypothesis — not 'true', but merely appropriate — which enables us to force her to *obey* the command that Man expresses by the lightest touch on a switch or a lever. The pace of discovery grows fantastic, and nevertheless — it must be repeated — human labour is *not* saved thereby. The number of necessary hands *grows* with the number of machines, because technical luxury enhances every other type of luxury,<sup>[18]</sup> and because the artificial life becomes more and more artificial.

Since the discovery of the Machine — the subtlest of all possible weapons against Nature — entrepreneurs and inventors have in principle devoted the number of hands that they needed to its *production*, the *working* of the Machine being done by inorganic force — steam or gas pressure, electricity, heat — liberated from coal, petroleum, and water. But this difference has dangerously accentuated the spiritual tension between leaders and led. The two no longer understand each other. The earliest 'enterprises' in the pre-Christian millennia required the *intelligent* co-operation of all concerned, who had to know and feel what it was all about. There was, therefore, a sort of camaraderie in it, rather like that which we have today in sport. But even by the time of the great constructions of Babylonia and Egypt this cannot have been the case any longer. The individual labourers comprehended neither the object nor the purpose of the enterprise as a whole, to which they were indifferent and perhaps hostile. 'Work' was a *curse*, as in the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. And now, since the eighteenth century, innumerable 'hands' work at things of which the real role in life (even as affecting themselves) is entirely unknown to them and in the creation of which, therefore, they have inwardly no share. A spiritual barrenness sets in and spreads, a chilling uniformity without height or depth. And bitterness awakes against the life vouchsafed to the *gifted* ones, the born *creators*. Men will no longer see,

nor understand, that leaders' work is the *harder* work, and that their own life *depends* on its success; they merely sense that this work is making their leaders happy, elating and enriching their soul, and so they hate them.

## 12

In reality, however, it is out of the power either of heads or of hands to alter in any way the destiny of machine technology, for this has developed out of inward spiritual necessities and is now correspondingly maturing towards its fulfilment and end. Today we stand on the summit, at the point when the fifth act is beginning. The last decisions are made. The tragedy is closing.

Every high culture *is* a tragedy. The history of mankind *as a whole* is tragic. But the sacrilege and the catastrophe of the Faustian are greater than all others, greater than anything Aeschylus or Shakespeare ever imagined. The creature is rising up against its creator. As once the microcosm Man was battling against Nature, so now the microcosm Machine is revolting against Nordic Man. The Lord of the World is becoming the Slave of the Machine, which is forcing him — forcing us all, whether we are aware of it or not — to follow its course. The victor, fallen, is dragged to death by the raging team.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the 'world' on this small planet looks like this: A group of nations of Nordic blood under the leadership of British, Germans, French, and Americans is in command of the situation. Their political power depends on their *wealth*, and their wealth consists in their *industrial* strength. But this in turn is bound up with the existence of coal. The Germanic peoples, in particular, are secured by what is almost a monopoly of the known coal fields, and this has led them to a multiplication of their populations that is without parallel in all history. On the ridges of this mountain of coal, and at the focal points of the lines of communication radiating from them, is collected a human mass of monstrous size, bred by machine technology. This

mass of humans both works for and gains its sustenance from that technology. To the other peoples — whether in the form of colonies or of nominally independent states — is assigned the role of providing the raw material and receiving the products. This division of function is secured by armies and navies, the upkeep of which presupposes industrial wealth, and which have been fashioned by so thorough a technique that they, too, ‘work’ by the pressing of a button. Once again the deep relationship, almost identity, of politics, war, and economics discloses itself. The *degree* of military power is dependent on the *intensity* of industry. Countries industrially poor are poor all round; they, therefore, cannot support an army or wage a war; therefore they are politically impotent; and, therefore, the workers in them, leaders and led alike, are pawns in the economic policy of their opponents.

In comparison with the masses of executive hands — who are the only part of the picture that discontent will look upon — the *increasing value* of the work of leadership carried out by the few creative heads (entrepreneurs, organisers, inventors, engineers) is no longer comprehended and valued,<sup>[19]</sup> insofar as it is so at all, practical America rates it highest, and Germany, ‘the land of poets and thinkers’, lowest. The imbecile phrase ‘The wheels would all be standing still, Did thy mighty arm so will’ beclouds the minds of chatterers and scribblers. That even a sheep could bring about, if it were to fall into the machinery. But to invent these wheels and set them working so as to provide that ‘strong arm’ with its living, that is something which only a few *born* to it can achieve.

These misunderstood and hated leaders, the ‘pack’ of the strong personalities, have a different psychology from this. They have not lost the old feeling of triumph of the beast of prey as it holds the quivering victim in its claws, the feeling of Columbus when he saw land on the horizon, the feeling of Moltke at Sedan that afternoon when from the heights of Frenois he watched the circle of his batteries completing itself down by Illy and sealing the victory.<sup>[20]</sup> Such

moments, such peaks of human experience, the shipbuilder, too, enjoys when a huge liner slides down the ways, and the inventor when his machine runs for the first time and is found to 'go splendidly', or when his first Zeppelin leaves the ground.

But it is of the tragedy of the time that this unfettered human thought can no longer grasp its own consequences. Technics has become as esoteric as the higher mathematics which it uses, while physical theory has refined its intellectual abstractions from phenomena to such a pitch that (without clearly perceiving the fact) it has reached the pure foundations of human knowing.<sup>[21]</sup> *The mechanisation of the world* has entered on a phase of highly dangerous over-tension. The picture of the Earth, with its plants, animals, and men, has altered. In a few decades most of the great forests have gone, to be turned into newsprint, and climatic changes have been thereby set afoot which imperil the land-economy of whole populations. Innumerable animal species have been extinguished, or nearly so, like the bison; whole races of humanity have been brought almost to the vanishing point, like the North American Indian and the Australian.

All things organic are dying in the grip of organisation. An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural. Civilisation has itself become a machine that does, or tries to do, everything in mechanical fashion. We think only in horsepower now; we cannot look at a waterfall without mentally turning it into electric power; we cannot survey a countryside full of pasturing cattle without thinking of its exploitation as a source of meat supply; we cannot look at the beautiful old handwork of a lively and primitive people without wishing to replace it by a modern technical process. Whether it has meaning or not, our technical thinking must have its actualisation. The luxury of the Machine is the consequence of a necessity of thought. In the final analysis, the Machine is a *symbol* — like its secret ideal, perpetual motion — a spiritual and intellectual necessity, but not a vital one.

It is beginning to contradict even economic practice in many ways. Already their divorce is being foreshadowed everywhere. The Machine, by its multiplication and its refinement, is in the end defeating its own purpose. In the great cities the automobile has by its numbers destroyed its own value, and one gets on quicker on foot. In Argentine, Java, and elsewhere the simple horse-drawn plough of the small cultivator has shown itself economically superior to the big motor implement, and is driving the latter out again. Already in many tropical regions the black or brown man with his primitive ways of working is a dangerous competitor to the modern plantation techniques of the white. And the white worker in old Europe and North America is starting to do work of doubtful quality.

It is, of course, nonsense to talk, as it was fashionable to do in the nineteenth century, of the imminent exhaustion of the coal fields within a few centuries and of its consequences — here, too, the materialistic age could not but think materially. Quite apart from the actual saving of coal by the substitution of petroleum and hydroelectric power, technical thought would soon manage to discover and open up still other and quite different sources of power. It is not worthwhile thinking ahead so far in time. For the West European-American technics *will itself have ended* by then. No stupid trifle like the absence of material would be able to hold up this powerful evolution. So long as the thought animating this evolution is up to the task, it will always know how to produce the means for its purposes.

But *how long* will it stay up to the task? Even on the present scale our technical processes and installations, if they are to be maintained at the present levels, require, let us say a hundred thousand outstanding brains, as organisers and inventors and engineers. These must be strong — indeed, even creative — talents, enthusiasts for their work, and formed for it by unwavering study of years' duration at great expense. Actually, it is just this calling that has irresistibly

attracted the strongest and ablest of the white youth for the last fifty years. Even the children play with technical things. In the urban classes and families, whose sons chiefly come into consideration in this connection, there was already a tradition of comfort and culture, so that the normal preconditions were already provided for that mature and autumnal product: technical intellectuality.

But all this is changing ever more noticeably in the last decades, in all the countries where large-scale industry is of old standing. The Faustian thought begins to be sick of machines. A weariness is spreading, a sort of pacifism in the battle with Nature. Men are returning to forms of life simpler and nearer to Nature; they are spending their time in sport instead of technical experiments. The great cities are becoming hateful to them, and they would fain get away from the pressure of soulless facts, from enslavement to the Machine, and the clear cold atmosphere of technical organisation. And it is precisely the strong and creative talents that are turning away from practical problems and sciences and towards pure speculation. Occultism and Spiritualism, Indian philosophies, metaphysical inquisitiveness under Christian or pagan colouring, all of which were despised in the Darwinian period, are coming up again. It is the voice of Rome in the Age of Augustus. Out of satiety of life, men take refuge from civilisation in the more primitive parts of the Earth, in vagabondage, in suicide. *The flight of the born leader from the Machine is beginning.* Soon only second-rate talent, successors of a greater age, will be available. Every big entrepreneur has occasion to observe a falling-off in the intellectual qualities of his recruits. But the grand technical development of the nineteenth century had been possible only because the intellectual level was constantly becoming higher. Even a stationary condition, short of an actual falling-off, is dangerous and points to an ending, however numerous and however well-schooled may be the hands ready for work.

And how is it with them? The tension between work of leadership and work of execution has reached the level of a catastrophe. The importance of the former,

the economic value of every real personality in it, has become so great that it is invisible and incomprehensible to the majority of the underlings. In the latter, the work of the hands, the individual is now *entirely* without significance. Only numbers matter. In the consciousness of this unalterable state of things, aggravated, poisoned, and financially exploited by egoistic orators and journalists, men are so forlorn that it is mere human nature to revolt against the role for which the Machine (not, as they imagine, its owners) earmarks most of them. There is beginning, in numberless forms — from sabotage, by way of strike, to suicide — *the mutiny of the Hands against their destiny*, against the Machine, against the organised life, ultimately against anything and everything. The organisation of work, as it has existed for thousands of years, based on the idea of ‘collective doing’<sup>[22]</sup> and the consequent division of labour between leaders and led, heads and hands, is being disintegrated from below. But ‘mass’ is no more than a negation (specifically, a negation of the concept of organisation) and not something viable in itself. An army without officers is only a superfluous and forlorn herd of men.<sup>[23]</sup> A chaos of brickbats and scrap-iron is a building no more. This mutiny, worldwide, threatens to put an end to the *possibility* of technical economic work. The leaders may take to flight, but the led, become superfluous, are lost. Their numbers are their death.

The third and most serious symptom of the collapse that is beginning lies, however, in what I may call *treason to technics*. What I am referring to is known to everyone, but it has never been envisaged in its entirety, and consequently its fateful significance has never disclosed itself. The immense superiority that Western Europe and North America enjoyed in the second half of the nineteenth century, in power of every kind — economic and political, military and financial — was based on an uncontested *monopoly* of industry. Great industries were only possible in connection with the coal fields of these Northern countries. The role of the rest of the world was to absorb the product,

and colonial policy was always, for practical purposes, directed to the opening-up of new markets and new sources of raw material, not to the development of new areas of production. There was coal elsewhere, of course, but only the ‘white’ engineers would have known how to get at it. We were in sole possession, not of the material, but of the methods and the trained intellects required for its utilisation. It is this that constitutes the basis of the luxurious living of the white worker — *whose income, in comparison with that of the coloured workers<sup>[24]</sup> is princely* — a circumstance that Marxism has turned to dishonest account, to its own ruin. It brings its own revenge today, for from now on, evolution is going to be complicated by the problem of unemployment. The high level of wages of the white worker, which is today a peril to his very *life*, ultimately rests exclusively upon the monopoly that the leaders of industry have created about him.<sup>[25]</sup>

And then, at the close of last century, the blind will to power began to make its decisive mistakes. Instead of keeping strictly to itself the technical knowledge that constituted their greatest asset, the ‘white’ peoples complacently offered it to all the world, in every university, verbally and on paper, and were proud of the astonishment of Indians and Japanese. The famous ‘dissemination of industry’ set in, motivated by the idea of getting bigger profits by bringing production into the marketing area. And so, in place of the export of finished products exclusively, they began an export of secrets, processes, methods, engineers, and managers. Even the inventors emigrate, for socialism, which could if it liked harness them in its team, expels them instead. And so presently the ‘coloured’ saw into our secrets, understood them, and used them to the full. Within thirty years the Japanese became technicians of the first rank, and in their war against Russia they revealed a technical superiority from which their teachers were able to learn many lessons. Today more or less everywhere — in the Far East, India, South America, South Africa — industrial regions exist, or coming into existence, which, owing to their

low wages, will face us with a deadly competition. The unassailable privileges of the white peoples have been thrown away, squandered, betrayed. The adversaries have caught up with their instructors. Possibly, with the cunning of the coloured races and the overripe intelligence of their ancient civilisations, they have surpassed them. Where there is coal, or oil, or hydroelectric power, there a new weapon can be forged against the heart of the Faustian Civilisation. Here begins the exploited world's revenge on its masters. The innumerable hands of the coloured races — at least as clever, and far less exigent — will shatter the economic organization of the whites at its foundations. The *accustomed* luxury of the white workman, in comparison with the coolie, will be his doom. The labour of the white is *itself* becoming superfluous. The huge masses of men centred in the Northern coal areas, the great industrial works, the capital invested in them, whole cities and districts, are faced with the probability of going under in the competition. The centre of gravity of production is steadily shifting away from them, especially since even the respect of the coloured races for the white has been ended by the World War. *This* is the real reason for the unemployment that prevails in the white countries. It is no mere crisis, but the *beginning of a catastrophe*.

But for the 'coloured' peoples (still including the Russians) the Faustian technology is no inner need. Only Faustian Man thinks, feels, and *lives* in its form. To him it is a *spiritual* need — not its economic consequences, but its *victories*: '*navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse*'.<sup>[26]</sup> For the 'coloured' it is only a weapon in their fight against the Faustian civilisation, a weapon like a tree branch in the woods that one throws away when it has served its purpose. This machine technology will end with the Faustian civilisation and will one day lie shattered and *forgotten* — railways and steamships as good as the old Roman roads and the Chinese wall, our giant cities with their skyscrapers just like the old palaces of Memphis and Babylon. The history of this technology

is fast approaching its inevitable end. It will be eaten up from within, like all great forms of any culture. When, and in what fashion, we know not.

Faced with this destiny, there is only one worldview that is worthy of us, the aforementioned one of Achilles: better a short life, full of deeds and glory, than a long and empty one. The danger is so great, for every individual, every class, every people, that it is pathetic to delude oneself. Time cannot be stopped; there is absolutely no way back, no wise renunciation to be made. Only dreamers believe in ways out. Optimism is *cowardice*.

We are born in this time and must bravely follow the path to the destined end. There is no other way. Our duty is to hold on to the lost position, without hope, without rescue. To hold on like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a door in Pompeii, who died because they forgot to relieve him when Vesuvius erupted. That is greatness; that is to have race. This honourable end is the one thing that cannot be taken from Man.

[1] The Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 103 et seq.

[2] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, chapter 4, 'The Soul of the City'.

[3] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 327 et seq., 343 et seq.

[4] The Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 165 et seq., pp. 308 et seq.

[5] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 334 et seq.

[6] Karl Theodor Strasser, *Wikinger und Normannen* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1928).

[7] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, chapter 11.

[8] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 300 et seq.

[9] Bacon's method is regarded as a forerunner of today's scientific method. –Ed.

[10] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 499 et seq.

[11] 'For experimentation alone gives proof', a similar method to Bacon's. –Ed.

[12] The Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 380 et seq.

[13] Petrus Peregrinus was a French scholar of the thirteenth century. –Ed.

[14] Nicole Oresme was a thirteenth-century French philosopher and Bishop.

[15] The Decline of the West, vol. 2, pp. 499 et seq. *Epistola de Magnete* of Petrus Peregrinus, 1269. (Latin: 'perpetual motion'. –Ed.)

[16] For even the Spaniards, Portuguese, and French who went out thither must surely have been, for the most part, descendants of the barbarian conquerors of the Great Migrations. The remainder, that stayed behind, were of a human type that had already lasted out the Celts, the Romans, and the Saracens.

[17] Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751) was a French Enlightenment philosopher. A materialist, La Mettrie held that the soul did not exist and that the human being was no more than a complex machine. –Ed.

- [18] Compare the living conditions of the working classes in 1700 and in 1900, and in general the way of life of town workers as compared with those on the land.
- [19] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, pp. 504 et seq.
- [20] Helmuth von Moltke (1800–1891) was a Prussian field marshal and the Chief of Staff of the Prussian Army from 1857 until 1887. He introduced many new techniques into the army which were to revolutionise military thinking. The Battle of Sedan was fought on 1 September 1870, and Prussia's victory in this battle led to its victory in the Franco-Prussian War. –Ed.
- [21] *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, pp. 420 et seq.
- [22] See section 8 above.
- [23] What the Soviet regime has been attempting for the last fifteen years has been nothing but the restoration, under new names, of the political, military, and economic organisation that it destroyed.
- [24] The term 'coloured' refers here also to the inhabitants of Russia and parts of southern and south-eastern Europe.
- [25] Without going further afield, the tension that exists on the matter of wages between the land-worker and the metal-worker is evidence of this.
- [26] 'To sail is necessary; to live is not.' Attributed by Plutarch to Pompey Magnus. –Ed.

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