

I.

EUROPEAN COORDINATES: IMAGES OF SECULAR ANTAGONISMS

By the end of the nineteenth century a very complex and peculiar situation emerged in Europe. Because of the changes in the composition of the middle class the process of secularization became inevitable legally, socially and intellectually.

While the Germans and Austrians somewhat hesitantly dealt with it in the 1870s, the Hungarian part of the Monarchy realized the manifestations of the so-called culture war (Kulturkampf) only in the 1890s. This clash of cultures contributed largely and in a legal sense, to the division and separation of church and state. In the areas inhabited by Germans the process lagged behind France and the Netherlands but inconsistently and incompletely it took place there as well.

The long period of secularization, leading occasionally to political conflicts, was linked with the spread of a new perspective which was intellectually accepted by an increasing number of people and which could be termed evolutionism.

The term evolutionism can be interpreted in a variety of intelligent and understandable ways. For the nineteenth century European development was obvious and the so-called "reality" became an increasingly proven entity. It could be felt, largely because of the industrial revolution and the strengthening of the middle classes, that the world was moving forward and that science produced rapidly increasing results which were useful for and usable by the public.

It also became evident that this development did not apply to everybody. While this process triumphed, increasing numbers suffered from the changes taking place rather than benefiting from them. Industrialization made the cities grow but many of its inhabitants were forced to exist in miserable conditions. The village did not provide any protection and mechanization of agriculture destroyed the traditional ways of life. While men believed that everything was changing for the better, a significant percentage of them felt that they were being left out even though they wished to be part of it.

At the same time evolutionism had a substantial natural historical and intellectual basis. People believed that the motivating forces behind the development were the inventions, the recognition of natural laws and their harnessing into service for humanity. The natural laws increasingly replaced "the will of God" and it was this that created the basis for new ways of thinking.

None of this meant that the traditional, meaning religious, intellectual coordinates disappeared. They became more worldly. It is one of the most basic and deepest intellectual traditions of European culture that there was a certain duality which interpreted, and still interprets, the world as the battle between God and Satan. The logic of secularization assisted this tradition to become more worldly and to find its points of identity in the materialistic sphere and not in the spiritual one.

In parallel to these processes, and partly in a mutual response to each other, there was something else going on. It gave a significant base for the question of what type of intellectual answers would appear in a secular, industrialized society which thought in scientifically initiated laws and which lived in the intellectual tradition of the God-Satan duality.

The concept of "community" and politics became an issue for the masses.

It is not my goal to unravel a process in social history but to demonstrate an intellectual social milieu evolving at the end of the nineteenth century. Industrialization and embourgeoisement demanded the expansion of the educational system leading immediately to the increase in the ability to read and write. An indirect consequence was the press, consumed by the various layers of society, the power of the written word, the publicity, and through it the expansion and mass dis-

tribution of the concept of “community.” The expansion of politics to the masses was only a small, logical step from here. Mass politics meant, and could mean, a distinct way of speaking and an easily digestible content.

I could mention that nineteenth century European liberalism made a specific effort to block this process. It not only strongly held on to the census-based franchise but it also undermined its own efforts. It undermined them by sponsoring equality before the law and thus opened the door to the establishment of associations, to increased literacy with its ideas about civilization, and to the spread of the printed media. It did everything to make politics a mass activity and to lead inevitably to the establishment of a universal, secret and uniform franchise.

Toward the mid-nineteenth century it still seemed in Europe that the management and synthesis of this multidirectional process could be guaranteed by the state. The modern concept of statehood, developed during the last decades of the eighteenth century in France, practically pervaded the entire continent. The nation proved adequate to be a secular, worldly divinity. National prayers (anthems) were composed in many countries and the holy banners of the church were replaced by national flags. There came the apostles of the nation-religion, its prophets and its Judases. The enemy of the nation was still Satan but under a different guise. This concept of the nation fit well into the evolutionary world image because it could grow, become stronger, and evolve further. It became a measure of dedication to the state to what extent an individual contributed to this. Through its secular divinity character the state progressed to developing a nation-religion that was satisfactory from the perspective of the expansion of the “community” principle. Nobody was excluded because right from the beginning, the nation defined itself as a community of culture and identity. In this way it was able to expand to the masses, which was well in keeping with the demands of the process turning to mass politics.

After the mid-century, however, it gradually became apparent that the culture-based national identity did not give a satisfactory explanation to the issues of achieving middle-class status, to capital accumulation in a broader sense, and to changing societal roles.

By the end of the century a very peculiar concept came into existence. The duality of God and Satan was preserved in a secular form

and even became stronger under the influence of various societal, religious, ethnic, and other tensions. It was impressed on people by the process of embourgeoisement and it became inevitable that there was some kind of development, some rationally perceptible progress which again reconfirmed that God and Satan really existed. In addition, due to the mass distribution of politics and "community," a collective worldly identity had to be sought that simplified the orientation and went beyond the fixed identity content of the nations. "Beyond" here meant that one could think about an ever narrowing redefinition of the nation or in a dimension which transected all categories of the nation along the lines of a different secular identity.

This situation provoked the intellectuals, having various motivations and orientations, to produce new types of explanations for the world, all having different emphases. Obviously they could not rid themselves of the norms of European cultural thought nor of the intellectual coordinates which were universal at their period and appeared to be quite "natural." In addition, they could also recognize that their structured pronouncements had a political market. They were not just engaged in intellectual games but were providing "spiritual nourishment" for those who sensed, but did not know, the processes among which they lived and the events that were happening to them.

On the European intellectual stage new doctrines of salvation appeared in the 1880s and 1890s and became more numerous by the turn of the century. Without exception they considered the evolutionary "natural law," according to their interpretation, to be a secular, hostile manifestation all of which could be translated into mass politics. It must be noted that there were other ideas as well but these were the new ones, representing a new type of worldview and therefore, from my perspective, they deserve to be discussed.

In principle there were three new significant directions for interpretation. In their logic they were very similar to each other but in their content they were quite different. Each of them sought an answer to the question as to who was responsible for all the bad things that all people sensed as a personal experience and all wished to demonstrate a collective world enemy image, a secular Satan. They all also viewed their interpretation as being scientific.

One interpretation placed evolutionism into a social Darwinist intellectual framework and raised the problem of race into the interpretation of the functioning of society. To be precise, they interpreted everything on a racial basis and raised interracial hierarchy to the level of a natural-societal law.

The work of the French Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, published in 1853–1855, raised practically no echo. When it was printed in German in 1900, however, it became required reading for the increasing number of adherents of racial interpretation. The largest number of readers on this subject, however, were those who ingested the work of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1899). This work was published in English as well.

Chamberlain (1855–1927) was born in England. After ten years of studies in Geneva and Dresden he went to Vienna in 1889 to study plant physiology. After a while he gave up on this activity and started to write about Richard Wagner. He became an ardent and convinced supporter of Pan-Germanism. He spent twenty years in Vienna. After a marriage of thirty years he divorced his half-Jewish wife and in 1902 he married Wagner's daughter Eva. They moved to Bayreuth. He became a German citizen in 1916 and by the 1920s he was a great admirer of Hitler.¹

His person seems to demonstrate that the turbulence of European culture and its search for orientation were not a local manifestation but were evidence of a general crisis and that one of the possible answers was a selectivity based on race. At the end of a century of colonization and of building colonial empires, the selective breeding of horses and of dogs, and the improvements in raising flowers made it appear to Chamberlain that it was logical and intellectually possible to organize humanity into racial hierarchies, eliminate the mongrels and breed the pure ones. Naturally the racially based approach indirectly made the corrupters and damagers of the superior races hateful and subject to suppression.

The great “advantage” of the racial interpretation was that it viewed history and the given present as the struggle of the groups

1 William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind. An Intellectual and Social History, 1848–1938*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 328–331.

assumed to be unified. It seemed logical that if the fight between “them” and “us” was decided in our favor, this “scientific” explanation would also be followed by the remedy of our problems. The racist perspective, as used in mass politics, established and nurtured a culture of language which through verbal stigmatization made it possible to eliminate lengthy arguments. If there are superior and inferior races and if we immersed ourselves into racial logic, the inferior ones could always be defined in negative terms, could have disgusting metaphors applied to them, which then retroactively strengthened the concept of racial hierarchy. The members of an inferior race could be defined as mischief makers and parasites. Thus, we are dealing here not only with a novel type of an abstract, intellectual, and holistic interpretation of society but also with a new possibility of creating a language of mass politics.

If there is a superior race then, relying on one of the oldest prejudices of European culture and reviving it, there can be a superior gender as well. This, naturally, was the male. Yet, if the male was superior, the female had to be inferior. This possible interpretation of the world, intellectually ambitious, was also elaborated in Vienna.

The work in question was the volume published in Vienna in 1903 under the title of *Geschlecht und Charakter* by Otto Weininger who committed suicide during the same year at an age of twenty-three years. In Weininger the duality of God and Satan is manifested in the dichotomy of male and female. Vis-à-vis the intellectual, creative male there is the instinctive, unproductive female. According to this interpretation the female is nothing but the personification of sexuality which with the sex act deprives the male of his creative forces and thereby ruins him. If we take male and female, interpreted metaphorically, they can naturally be converted into racial categories and this is precisely what Weininger did. I will not say more about him at this point. He is one of the stars of this small volume and we can learn much more about him and about his peculiar views in what follows.

In the intellectual search for a way and in the emotional turmoil at the turn of the century an idea, which was first drafted in the 1840s, and published in the *Communist Manifesto*, came to a crossroad and then evolved beyond being an intellectual trend and in 1889 became a political movement in the form of the Second International. One of the pos-

sibilities was represented by the trade union movement and by the political activities of the Social Democrats which aimed to stimulate the liberal political establishment toward the systematic implementation of liberalism. On the other hand, the issue was whether a universal, secret and uniform franchise could transform an idea into a total identity at the time of the turn of the century in a world which encompassed a number of peculiar processes. Would a class-based thought start a movement to take complete power over the people and the state and, defining the enemy in these terms, could it convert its discussion about society into an antagonistic God-Satan duality?

In the turn-of-the-century search for identities that could explain the entire world it seemed self-explanatory that the radical political redrafting of the world could be attempted along the lines of "class." It was almost at the same time with Chamberlain, Weininger and other path seekers that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) wrote a pamphlet entitled *What Is To Be Done?* This pamphlet, designed as an intellectual exercise, in its title was much closer to the nineteenth century populist Nikolai Chernyshevsky than to Karl Marx.

The *What Is To Be Done?* is a political debating pamphlet. It was drafted in opposition to the so-called "opportunistic" labor movement which endeavored to limit the activities of the proletariat to the economic struggle. The movement intended to use political elements only in linkage with its economic demands and favored the "spontaneous" fight of the workers over the conscious, well-organized struggle. Lenin's goal was a new type of proletarian party, a vanguard of the revolutionaries. It was here that Lenin's arguments had their most significant directional mandate: in itself the "working class" is only a potential category, which could be made into a political power only through class consciousness. This consciousness has to be implanted from the outside because this was the only way in which it could become a real group with political awareness. The class could not properly explain itself and it is essential to implant the ideas and have an organizational framework, a party, i.e. *the party* which is the conscious essence of the class. It was with this assistance that the class could represent all of humanity and come to power. This power logically was linked to the destruction of the bourgeoisie. Class consciousness and party mindedness flow into one and these assumptions created the opportunity to

make the enemies of the party appear as the enemies of the class. More accurately, this construction offered the general use of “class-speak” and “party-speak” of which one of the components was the concept of party enemies and class enemies. Thus ethical concepts were introduced into the thought processes with the party being ethically positive and the class enemies being ethically negative.

God and Satan were, once again, among us.

This reasoning is held to be scientific because it makes the otherwise profoundly nineteenth century Marxist doctrines, taken out of their context, appear as though they had linkages of universal validity. Among the authors mentioned above Lenin is the only person who could be viewed as an intellectual who wrote his extensive opus with a goal directed toward political practice. In his worldview the savior of humanity was the proletariat and the greatest opposition of salvation was the bourgeoisie. We know that with the other authors the corresponding forces were the superior race and the superior gender confronting the inferior race and the female.

Lenin’s work is considered, legitimately, by many to be the fundamental intellectual basis of Bolshevism. According to his interpretation, the class is much less of a social historical identity category than a political one. Therefore, the party is just the association of the elect and the essence of the working class.

Defining class as a political group fits well into the intellectual movements of the turn of the century which were seeking new paths toward salvation and were, at the same time, restrictive and searching for and creating enemies while being metaphorical in character.

Every such brief summary is necessarily simplistic. In this review of European thought there is a Frenchman, a Briton, an Austrian, and a Russian. They had adherents and followers. They also had associates who modified some of their views and they also had opponents in the debates. Together they effectively demonstrated the increasing intellectual search for a way out which was motivated by the crisis of modernity at the turn of the century. I must admit that I use the term “crisis of modernity” hesitantly and only for lack of a better one. All of them sought new explanations and new solutions but only Lenin had direct political objectives. Yet in 1902 Lenin did not have a chance of becoming a politically significant factor. The new explana-

tions differed in content but were based on a similar logic and only elevated and debased different things. This is why in many instances they became interchangeable and race could be replaced by political identity and vice versa. The gender hierarchy and internal antagonism could be converted to racial categorization. The same strange interchangeability was characteristic of the conversion of the various salvation doctrines into mass political language. The bourgeoisie could be defined as parasites and being immoral just like the races which were considered to be inferior. So was the female.

Yet these searches for a way out were of a theoretical nature and remained intellectually intact because, according to the authors' intentions, they were generated on the basis of theoretical requirements. This was independent of the fact that they were all created at the time of the world being in a crisis. The works were not written as pamphlets or articles but were books containing extensive explanations and which were frequently longer than necessary. The authors intended them to be an intellectual discourse and not a subject for mass policy consumption.

The truth is that these ideas and logical structures became much more successful than what most of the authors would have expected. In many ways they defined the twentieth century, in a historical rather than chronological sense, and their effects can be felt to this day.

Here I am thinking not only of the fact that the race theory was the fundamental ideological and political basis of Nazism while the class in a political sense, the party and the "class enemy," became the intellectual and political axis of Bolshevism. I could think also only of the fact that many millions perished because some individuals wanted to transform these intellectual concepts into reality.

This would be already a great deal but I believe that we are dealing with even more. Turn-of-the-century Europe, reflecting on the crisis of modernity in European culture, produced interpretational methodology and contents which exerted significant influence, not only politically but also intellectually on the thinking of the European intelligentsia, on the ideological horizon, on the conceptual world, and on moral convictions. We are dealing with an intellectual search for a way out, a process linked to an era but with an effect that goes far beyond that era. All this indicates that the contents of the intellectual discourses are even more important than they appeared to be initially.

From the certitude of retrospection, one can never predict what intellectual production will lead to what, and particularly not when this was likely to happen.

In the age of mass politics one can no longer talk about self-centered and innocent intellectual discourses.