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The critique of *homo economicus*

Stirner's redefinition of property

Anyone trying to piece together a radical social philosophy in midnineteenth-century Europe had, before all else, to decide his attitudes to the rapidly emerging phenomenon, 'economic man'. In particular he had to pit himself intellectually against the increasingly dominant liberal-rationalist ideology emanating from England. The rationalist drive to classify and to quantify and the utilitarian drive to maximize material happiness were combining with the effect of increasing the scale and the efficiency of industrial production at exponential rates. The 'rationalization' of work processes, the increasing division of labour, demanded that men be useful in increasingly specific ways, and irrespective of personal interests other than the need to earn a subsistence wage. The utilitarian concern with saving time ultimately served to streamline the whole gamut of social interaction. Human interests, dissociated from individual gratification, were progressively subordinated to the economic calculus.

Thus Marx accepted the axiom of English Political Economy that the foundation of social structure is economic, but proceeded to redefine economics in terms of his alternative conception of human interests. Thus Stirner contemporaneously sought through redefining the concepts 'property' and 'possession' to constitute economic behaviour as a function of his ethical principles. Thus Dostoevsky launched a savage and blanket attack on liberal-rationalist ideology and praxis.

Stirner alone establishes a positive anarcho-psychological economic theory; there is no subsequent advance upon his formulation of how men are to trade with each other. The crux of the task he sets himself is to give an unabstract living meaning to the concept 'property', to rediscover man's proper-ties. Above all he sets out to construct an alternative to Adam Smith's rationalist-utilitarian model. Unfortunately English cannot adequately translate the German title of his book. *Ein/eigen* which translates as *one/unique/proper* forms the root of both *Einzig* and *Eigentum*. Thus the impression is conveyed of the unique one and the uniqueness of his property.

Private property, Stirner holds, exists by grace of the law. Regulated and ratified by the State, it is the State's property on loan to the individual.¹ The distinction between egoistic freedom and negative freedom pervades the analysis. Property is bound by conditions, and, as in the case of marriage, possession must be circumscribed by law; 'But property is *my* property only when I hold it *unconditionally*: only I, an *unconditional* ego, have property, enter a relation of love, carry on free trade'.²

¹ *Ego*, pp. 160–70.

² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Symptomatic of Stirner's method is his radical reinterpretation of the abstract economic term 'free trade'. No longer does it serve as the technical description of a relation between tariff laws and the import of commodities, but draws its meaning from the life and aspirations of the individual. This is not to deny the need in a community to plan the 'balance of payments', but to suggest that such economic manipulation is secondary activity, and should be carried out with a minimum of fuss, as it plays no role in the real interests of the individual. Stirner seeks to devalue economic activity which is not germane to the enjoyment of life; this entails a critique of *homo economicus*, the cleric in mercantile clothing.

Stirner's concern never deviates from the essential *value* of things, the significance they have for their proprietor; the matter of deeds of ownership is trivial to real possession. Ownership is a function of the satisfaction derived from consumption, in effect, the owner's power over the consumer-good.³ The pauper is he who doesn't value himself,⁴ the rich man of the Gospels he who has to find prestige in the quantity of his possessions. (He envies Lazarus when it is too late.)

From this point of view the value placed on an article and the possessor's self-valuation are inseparable. For example, let us consider an idealized picture of the French family which sits down for three hours to eat the main meal of the day. It takes the consumption of food as the starting point for an elaborate intercourse which will include the savouring of a series of varied, yet carefully complemented dishes, the relation of anecdotes, and a lively repartee on the affairs of the day. The meal has been transformed into a medium for the rich expression of the life of the family and the individuality of its members. Where Stirner writes of 'free trade' he refers to consumers creating their own code of commerce (also, we may take it, in the erotic sense), finding the mode of consumption which suits their particular needs, and thus building a house on the foundations of *their* 'creative nothing'. And unless man realizes his 'creative nothing', Stirner adds, there is nothing. The utilitarian and otherwise meaningless act of eating a meal can be turned into a stage on which the most satisfying of human trade can ply; and it is our thoughts, our affections, our spontaneous expressions, much more than the fruit of our trade with the greengrocer, that we enjoy trading freely. Dostoevsky will make the point that we do not build palaces merely to shelter ourselves from the rain; we also have to live in them, and for the cultivation of that *art* a utilitarian heritage is a liability.¹

This failure to realize the worth of property is usually due to what Stirner types as State ownership. The labourer exhausts himself for nothing but the smooth running of the State;² there is the debilitating contamination effect which Marx noted in his *1844 Manuskrifte*—after work the labourer is too tired to enjoy his leisure. He no longer has the real power to choose in his life. Stirner points in the same context to the alienating phenomenon of conformity in consumption. Whenever a man does not act out of pure self-enjoyment, whenever there is a sense of his conforming to someone else's judgment of the good and

³ Stirner may have taken his cue from one of Goethe's epigrams: 'What you have inherited from your fathers, Earn it, in order to possess it' (*Faust* I:682–3).

⁴ *Ego*, p. 163.

¹ *Notes from Underground*, p. 119.

² *Ego*, pp. 102–3.

the worthwhile, without his having experienced for himself the validity of that judgment, the choice is not fully his own; he is then in the service of a phantom, an *ought*, which can always be traced to the influence of the State.³ Only the mature egoist transcends the State's monopoly on choice; only he has the resources for realizing his 'free-will.' In fact, *Der Einzige* can be read in its anticipation of existentialism as an exercise in differentiating *determined* phenomena (ideals, idols, fetishes, morals) from those that are *free* (egoistic possessions).

Stirner does not advocate the abolition of money; he realizes that some means of exchange is necessary to keep resources flowing. In any case: 'it is not the money that does you damage, but your incompetence to take it'.⁴ The lust for 'filthy lucre', and the passion for accumulation, preclude the calm enjoyment of possessions; the frantic restlessness which they inspire indicates how unegoistic is this drive in search of a new master—money.¹ Avarice for money is closely related to avarice for time; Stirner poses the complementary value question: 'For whom is time to be gained?'² His criticism is not only directed against the existing structure of labour. He suggests that pleasure, taken at one's own place in one's own time, has been forgotten, and by communist and utilitarian alike—they both value property itself, who owns it and in what quantities, above all else. Labour is rarely the enjoyable product of one's 'ownness'; but even where men recognize that their work is not satisfying in itself, they forget that its value to them is no more than as the means to the enjoyment possible when it is finished, when the chores are completed. Stirner here ventures into the field of the anti-hedonistic, Puritan ethos of capitalism as it reveals itself in the hoarding of money, the possessive retention of feelings, and the compulsion to save time.

According to Stirner real price is not determined by the market forces of supply and demand; each person counts for how much he feels he is worth.³ The value of an individual lies in his uniqueness, which by definition transcends all comparative standards. So he accepts no predetermined value, he sets his own price. Moreover, value does not grow at all in the manner of its economic analogue, the price for a specific commodity: price inflation is not generated by any intrinsic improvement in the quality of the goods.

The problem of how to make comparisons of value has beset all economic theories, *laissez-faire* and socialist alike, since Smith and Bentham. The price paid to enter the Uffizi Gallery cannot be related, with any rationale, to the rapture to which an admirer of art may be moved by a few blobs of Botticelli's paint. Enjoyment is invaluable, it is its own priceless value. Men worry themselves over the economic value of things only after the joy, or as a substitute for the joy they are not getting.⁴

³ Stirner at times uses 'State' as no more than a convenient shorthand for supra-individual authority in the post-Christian world. It nevertheless retains the specific associations attributed to it in the critique of ideology.

⁴ *Ego*, p. 185.

¹ *Ego*, pp. 177–8, 207–8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴ Even the élitist Nietzsche communicated his disgust at the 'common man' being forced into the role of *homo economicus*: 'Shame, that there should be a price at which one is no longer a person, but becomes a screw' (*Morgenröte* 206).

A complex of problems arises here. Enjoyment cannot be evaluated cardinally, that is, have a fixed price put on it which relates it precisely to the value of other things. But neither is an ordinal ranking plausible. No other person can convince the admirer of Botticelli that he gets *greater* pleasure from this painting, for emotive states in different individuals are incomparable; there is no arbiter who experiences the enjoyment of both persons. A second problem for an economic theory of price arises from the changeability of one person's enjoyment of the same object over time, according to his mood, the state of his knowledge, and innumerable other unpredictable (chance) factors. The problem of how to quantify value, once it is accepted that its major index is that intangible and inconstant state we have categorized as 'enjoyment', seems insuperable. The Benthamite equation of market price with interest value is spurious, as both Marx and Stirner point out. Must economic theory hence turn in on itself, and accept that an unbridgeable chasm separates it from all questions of value? Must price theory limit itself to describing material intercourse as it *is* pursued, and forgo all interest in how a more total intercourse *could* be pursued? Stirner's challenge is that economics must either mediate human interest or be scrapped. Liberal-rationalism, by focussing on positivist techniques of quantification, had launched economic science in precisely the wrong direction, effecting a repression of ethical questions.

Stirner's supreme economic value is enjoyment. He phrases the crux of his philosophy in terms of an alternative: 'not how one can acquire life, but how one can squander, enjoy it; or, not how one is to produce the true self in himself, but how one is to dissolve himself, to live himself out'.² Stirner exhorts: 'Consume yourself!' The command is directed wholly to the present moment; each moment is to be enjoyed in and for itself, so that with Goethe, in Faust's famous closing lines: 'to the moment I might say: Abide, you are so fair!' The slightest trace of the Puritan attachment of classical economics to *saving* is pleasure-destroying; moreover, in that it denies Stirner's existential 'I am—present', it denies the self and its unquantifiable logic of realization.

Stirner and Nietzsche choose the song and the dance respectively as the media providing the most complete possibilities of self-expression. In the dance, music and often poetry, the most refined of man's spiritual sublimations, are translated into the sensual. In the growing ecstasy of the performance the awakened body transcends its daily capability. It is here that the two souls in Goethe's breast,³ the lusty earth-bound one, and its sublime brother which yearns for the heavens, are woven into one. Rare spiritual longing and intense corporeal eros infuse each other.

The metaphors of the dance and the song provide the clue to the key anachronological orientation which, drawing from Schiller's 'aesthetic letters' of 1793–4, projects *play* as a fundamental component of satisfying behaviour. The predominant characteristic of play is that it is wholly immanent and self-contained, it encompasses its own course and meaning, it mediates no ulterior long-term purpose, and it is pursued in

¹ The greatest practical advance made in the direction of taking more account of human interests in economic calculation was the adaptation of such techniques as cost-benefit analysis to notions of social cost and social benefit. Yet recognition that a planner must take account not only of the costs of building a motorway, but of the resulting despoliation of the environment, in no way eases the recurring problem: how to *quantify* the aesthetic cost of such a project.

² *Ego*, p. 225; see, in particular, my footnote.

³ *Faust* I:1112–1121.

the present with no explicit hope of enjoyable after-effects.¹ The play ethic is counterposed against, on the one hand, rationalism, with its cold, prosaic dissection of living matter, and, on the other, utilitarian economics, with its dour teleological connections. In the language of utilitarianism, play is ‘useless’.² Huizinga, following Plato in arguing that culture is born-of play, was to characterize the nineteenth century and its ‘grotesque overestimation of the economic factor’ with the telling metaphor: ‘All Europe donned the boiler-suit’.³

In this view man is human not by virtue of his work and how *useful* he is, but by virtue of his play and how *superfluous* he is. It is his superfluity of energy which funds his play, and by means of which he creates his ‘surplus product’—surplus to what is economically functional and necessary. Impulses surplus to the quanta required to provide for his economic needs are the source of his creativity, of the activities which fulfil him. Stirner’s philosophy exhorts man to realize his abundance, to relish the exuberant playfulness, mischievousness, and curiosity for which he has plentiful energy.

The counterposition here of play against work does not carry the tone of carefree hedonism. Nietzsche defines *maturity* as ‘having found again the seriousness one had as a child, at play’.⁴ ‘Serious play’ is man’s greatest achievement in sublimation: for Nietzsche it is supremely useful, as the principal creative means by which man learns to channel his surplus impulses, and thereby make himself ‘interesting’. Freud elaborates this perspective. The psychoanalyst believes that the child uses his toys to represent the forces and objects which dominate his world: he externalizes through his play the unconscious tensions which threaten to annihilate him, thereby managing to neutralize some of the terror which they induce by expressing them, and hence being able to test himself against their explicit form.¹ Play in this sense is a means of coping with anxiety through acting out the fantasy which provokes it. Play is satisfyingly serious in a way that work, divorced from imaginative associations, can never be.²

¹ J. Huizinga notes five characteristics of play (*Homo Ludens*, 1949, ch. 1). Apart from its self-contained nature he finds that play is always voluntary, it is a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a pretending, temporary sphere of activity, it can be repeated and usually is, and finally it creates order, a temporary, limited perfection.

² The germ of the idea was taken up by Veblen and developed in his theory of ‘conspicuous consumption’ (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899). He distinguishes useful consumption, conspicuous or ostentatious consumption, and conspicuous leisure. The latter two categories represent ‘wasteful’ activities (pp. 85, 97–101), in which life is not enhanced. Although Veblen does not discuss ‘useless’ activities which perform a positive psychological role, he stands out as one of the links between anarcho-psychology and modern theorists of leisure (e.g. Fromm, Riesman, Marcuse, Norman Brown, Mumford).

³ *Homo Ludens*, ch. 11.

⁴ *Jenseits* 94.

¹ Freud: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 8–11. For examples, Melanie Klein: *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 1932, intro.

² Recent discoveries in the fields of molecular biology and linguistics support the hypothesis that man’s highest function is his capacity for subjective simulation of his external environment. Play is the outward expression of this simulation (Jacques Monod: *Le Hasard et la nécessité*, 1970, ch. 8). This evidence favouring the defining image of *homo ludens* correspondingly devalues the image of man as the tool-making animal, or as *homo faber*.

Stirner reinforces his case against *homo economicus* in his reply to Feuerbach's critique of *Der Einzige*. He develops his antirationalism:³

Do you exist only when you think on yourself, and do you decay when you forget yourself; do you exist only through self-consciousness? Who would not forget himself every moment, who would not depart from himself a thousand times every hour? This self-forgetting, this self-losing is only a means of our satisfaction, of enjoyment of our world, our property, that is world-enjoyment.

Stirner's suggestion that man opens himself to ecstasy only when he 'loses himself', when his consciousness lapses, complements his earlier, immoralist stress on the need to transcend the bad conscience: when the child is fully absorbed in his play he does not bother to evaluate whether what he does is good or evil—he transcends both his self-consciousness and his superego in enjoyment. Play is self-justifying, and therefore obviates the need for a rationalization. At the opposite pole to clerical earnestness is the ideal of play, representing a seriousness which is uniquely personal and a gaiety which is abandoned.

Play, to go beyond Stirner, has another relevant quality: in what is complete, symmetrical, and closed, man seems to find a compelling harmony. The peculiar enchantment of the Euclidean theorem lies in its utter completeness; every step is precise and necessary, pointing unambiguously to the course of the proof, which in turn is simple, and thus all the more indelible. Analogously the hedonistic egoist wants each moment to be self-contained, self-determined, and closed—to be its own completeness. His attitude contrasts with that of *homo economicus*, whose attachment to future goals means that his experience is never closed, and never present.

The numerous contrasts between the Stirnerian and liberal-rationalist philosophies emerge in full relief only when it is recognized what antithetical frames of mind, what antithetical tempos of being and structures of feeling, lie behind them. The tone of Stirner's orientation to life is gay and exuberant, playful and expansive; the tone of the utilitarian disposition is cautious and reserved, prudential and considered. Victorian morality, with its attitude that play is waste—wasted money, wasted time, wasted virtue—was the logical development of the liberal-rationalist tradition. What we are isolating here is an ontological dichotomy, one which can be characterized by juxtaposing two human types, on the one hand the bureaucratic accountant, ordering statistical facts, and on the other, Nietzsche's 'gay scientist', he who does all his thinking on morning walks in the Alps. The two experience different worlds: their perceptions, their interests, their emotional responses, share virtually nothing in common.

Hand in hand with the revaluation of property goes Stirner's endeavour to draw 'competition' back into the domain of the individual. He had learnt from Hegel that the first task of the philosopher was to make abstract concepts concrete through grounding them in experience. Stirner had a rare gift for accomplishing the third stage of Hegel's dialectical process, that of bringing concepts applicable to the object world beyond the individual, which have become dissociated from him, *back* into his own consciousness. He

³ 'Recensenten Stirners', *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 355.

is one of the best examples of a philosopher who, again in Hegel's language, does not think 'abstractly'.¹ When he cannot reinterpret an abstraction, for example 'Man', in terms of the individual's living experience, he discards it.

'Things compete, whereas the individual asserts his competence', paraphrases Stirner's new economics.² The individual's unique force (*Kraft*) alone brings life and significance to labour;³ satisfaction lies in the competence with which work is executed, and so the product's value to the maker, and indeed usually to the consumer, lies in the unique stamp that it bears.⁴ Thus Stirner advocates a craftsman's morality; in urging men to follow their competence he emphasizes the need for each person to realize himself in the mastery of his craft.⁵ The finest exemplification of this prominent, notably anarchist theme of the nineteenth-century was to come twenty years later with Wagner's musically rendered vision of the German artist-craftsman, *Die Meistersinger*, with his 'master-song'.

After the act of creation the subsidiary problem of exchange arises, the necessity for the individual to barter the products of his competence for a wider range of goods. Because the egoist is the only judge of his own worth there is no incentive for him to accept the State's valuation of his work. Stirner here appears to be advocating a meritocracy, in which the individual somehow asserts his own merit. But at this point *Der Einzige* is more convincing in its critique of a Benthamite or *laissez-faire* system than in providing a viable alternative.

We need to take care to distinguish Stirner, the practical guide to living in society here-and-now, from the Stirner who sketches the better social order of the future. In the former case his argument runs parallel with *laissez-faire* liberalism's defence of the individual, and his competence to do the best he can for himself. Marx accused Stirner of being a disguised utilitarian,¹ and indeed *Der Einzige* does appear to follow Bentham's utility theory half-way. By asserting that people ought to maximize their enjoyment Stirner presupposes a kind of pleasure principle. He makes one distinctively Benthamite statement:²

I utilize the world and men!... We have only one relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use.

Moreover, his egoism recalls that of Adam Smith's comment:³

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.

¹ Hegel's article *Wer denkt abstrakt?*, included in Kaufmann: *Hegel* (pp. 460–5).

² *Ego*, pp. 171, 176.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.

⁴ Stirner elsewhere notes that alienation is an irremovable component of any creative process: 'as my own creatures they are already alienated from me after the act of creation' (*ibid.*, p. 247).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.

¹ *German Ideology*, pp. 448–60.

² *Ego*, pp. 204–5.

³ Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1, p. 13.

Both Stirner and the liberal-rationalists grant a central place in their respective schemas to some form of the pleasure principle. Any further similarities are secondary. Stirner dismisses the principle of the natural identity of interests, realized through the economic market, as a pure fiction; the surrogate principle of the artificial identification of interests through enforceable legislation, whether utilitarian or liberal, is regarded as likewise representing an arbitrary means of creating social cohesion. But the fundamental incompatibility between Stirner and liberal-rationalism is over the nature of the pleasure principle itself: for egoist philosophy there are no significant means of deriving the quantified indices necessary to the working of a rational economic model. Stirner's 'utility', founded upon the command 'Squander yourself!', cannot be used to generate a social principle: it is exclusively a-social in any terms but those of the small group. On the other hand, Bentham introduces egoism *within* the social system: he aims to unite the individual and society.

Above all, and encompassing other distinctions, Stirner is concerned with questions of *being* and of *self*, with locating a centre to the individual's existence, sublimated from his passions, which qualitatively transcends biological descriptions of energy flow. Stirner's concept of utility is not that of Bentham; he holds to a joy-principle rather than to a pleasure-principle. The significant fact that he does not refer to getting *pleasure* out of life, but to getting *enjoyment*, illustrates the cardinal concern of the anarcho-psychological tradition with ontology. This concern is Hegelian. The case is opposite for Bentham, whose philosophical orientation virtually precludes a notion of the 'self'; the individual cannot be a phenomenon of *ontological* interest to the scientific mind which is intent on quantifying and correlating human satisfactions—the Benthamite passion to build a calculated system depends on an obliviousness to 'being', and an obliviousness to psychology as it has been characterized in this study. Thus although anarcho-psychology and liberalrationalism start from a similar assumption about human motivation they soon develop into opposed social philosophies.¹

Nietzsche too, in assessing knowledge in terms of its utility, had laid himself open to the charge of utilitarianism. But it is meaningless to define utilitarianism in terms of its focussing concern with 'utility': the decisive question is utility in terms of which goals. The values and goals which frame the Benthamite notion of utility are as remote from the Nietzschean Will-to-Power as from Stirner's 'interests'. Indeed, Nietzsche is at crucial odds with three central Benthamite concerns: quantification, useful work, and the notion of social and economic progress. He jots down in his notebook:²

Utility and pleasure are *slave theories* of life: the 'blessing of work' is self-glorification of slaves.—Incapacity for leisure.

Stirner views the purely economic trade of utilitarian philosophy, and the endeavours of capitalist individualism, as constituting gross drudgeries. But a man must survive, and so it is necessary for him to play the economic game, at least for part of his day, with all

¹ This is not to deny that these traditions have in common a fundamental disagreement with the socialist assumption about the primacy of the social group. Stirner and Mill both make clear, for example, their contempt for the herding spirit—group action, group solidarity, and group security. But while they share individualist preferences in this context their concepts of the individual are radically divergent.

² *Wille* 758.

the exploitative cunning at his call. Stirner's subversive advice, borrowing an image from Heine, is to *smuggle*, carry on free trade behind the back of the State.¹ Thief, cheat, and deceive, he urges; these words frighten only those who affirm the laws of the State—Stirner does not accept the possibility of a 'social contract'. Once private property has been instituted so has theft, as the means to ownership. It is as foolish, Stirner adds, to expect the rich to give up their property (are they to be blamed for poverty? he asks), as to expect the State to raise the basic wage-level without its power being threatened.²

The discussion of work and its formative potential is closed with the point that too much time is spent on unenjoyable activity, on 'human labours'—those concerned with everyday necessity.³ This argument is developed into a second, attacking the generative root of industrial society. Stirner describes the fragmentation enforced by the division of labour on the life of the worker. Industry selects which part of the labourer it needs to utilize, irrespective of his desire or his real talent. Here Stirner marches in step with the contemporaneously written *1844 Manuskripte* of Karl Marx. He refers to Adam Smith's discussion of pin-manufacture and the advantages of a division of labour:⁴

If a factory worker must tire himself to death twelve hours and more, he is cut off from becoming man. Every labour is to have the intent that the man be satisfied. Therefore he must become a *master* in it too, be able to perform it as a totality. He who in a pin-factory only puts on the heads, only draws the wire, works, as it were, mechanically, like a machine; he remains half-trained, does not become a master: his labour cannot *satisfy* him, it can only *fatigue* him. His labour is nothing by itself, has no object in itself, is nothing complete in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is *used* (exploited) by this other. For this labourer in another's service there is no *enjoyment of a cultivated mind*, at most, crude amusements: *culture*, you see, is barred against him.

In Stirner's ideal social unit, the Union, the strategy of economic insurrection is no longer relevant; there socio-economic intercourse is carried out voluntarily, it is not bound by rules. However, Stirner does not devote much space to describing his ideal society. His achievement is not to draw up a comprehensive blueprint for how to live and what to do, but to uncover the non-abstract, living values in terms of which he conceives that human action at its best would be conducted. His work explores the possibilities of individual enjoyment and fulfilment, and his maxims sketch the frame of mind most conducive to transforming life in society into the terms of these values. Stirner inaugurates the spirit in which human existence can be pursued egoistically. 'Egoist' and 'Union' are ideal-types, rough guides as to the direction in which individual and social life could become more gratifying. But it is unlikely that anyone other than a fanatic could embody them in a total sense, and this is their great weakness. Stirner paid a price for his own philosophy: it left him with the practical alternatives of translating his despised Adam Smith into German, or going to debtors' prison—he was, by the end, to have done both.

¹ *Ego*, p. 230.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4. The notion of property as theft is borrowed from Proudhon's *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* (1840).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Marx and Engels have some grounds for levelling the charge of ideology at Stirner's economics. *Der Einzige* exhibits little understanding of the magnitude of the influence exerted by the forces of economic production over social structure, and the limitations that are thereby placed on patterns of individual behaviour. Stirner had not experienced the growing power of technology to determine the course of social development. Economic postulates bear the weakness of abstraction if they are not grounded in a detailed and systematic analysis such as that to which Marx devoted the later part of his life. Stirner's theory remains relevant mainly to those who live in the interstices of industrial society, or those few whose leisure hours are not contaminated by their work experience.

On the other hand Stirner's opening assumption has been borne out: he assumed that unless the fundamental categories of economics such as 'property' were to be redefined in a radically personal way the liberal-rationalist curse which had established economics as a scientific discipline cut off from human interests would proliferate. Economic models, whether in the tradition of Marshall, of modern neo-classical theory, of socialist theory, or even of Keynes, have failed to incorporate any meaningful index of individual benefit other than the original utilitarian one, successfully disqualified by both Marx and Stirner, the index of increasing income or an increasing flow of commodities. There has been no attempt to rethink the significance of 'property'. As Stirner would have put it, the State has won. Economics has not escaped from its self-created cage as positivist and ideological. Moreover, the onus is still on Marxist economics to prove that it too is not trapped in the same cage, that it can inspire and direct a better praxis than the Russian and Eastern European examples suggest.

Dostoevsky's critique of utilitarianism and socialism

Fyodor Dostoevsky stands out as a contributor to the anarcho-psychological perspective for a complex of reasons. His credentials as a pioneering *psychologist*, exploring similar territory to Stirner and Nietzsche, are indisputable. Nietzsche wrote: 'Dostoevsky, the only psychologist, incidentally, from whom I had something to learn'.¹ Freud acclaimed him as a creative genius only marginally less great than Shakespeare.² His work is directed by a pervasive interest in the unconscious patterns of human motivation. One of Dostoevsky's key structural devices in his novels is to throw his characters into situations in which they are so involved, in passion or humiliation, that they do not reflect upon themselves, do not have time to arrange the face that they would wish the world to see. His ambition is to expose the deeper roots of the psyche by removing the character's conscience, and describing his less censored responses. Freud employs the analytical device of concentrating attention on neurosis in order to achieve precisely the same *psychological* goal.

We have included a second criterion in defining the psychologist: he evaluates human action in terms of its significance for the individual psyche. The *Notes from Underground* is unambiguously psychological in this sense; so are major sections of the novels, as illustrated by the intense absorption with which the central characters, with rare exceptions, pursue their individual salvation. The characters themselves provide the loci of coherence in the

¹ *Götzen-Dämmerung* ix:45.

² 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', *Collected Papers V*, p. 222.

novels: no other structurings of reality recover from the demolition into chaos to which they are subjected. The paradigm is the underground man and his singularly anarchist politics. (We recall that any perspective which concentrates its interest on the individual bears implicit anarchist traits.)

But Dostoevsky also creates characters like Alyosha Karamazov who point beyond themselves, who are ‘immune to egoism’. One of the recurring concerns of the other, Christian Dostoevsky is to show the destructive force of egoism. Through the character of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* he analyses the fall of a man who aspires to be ‘extraordinary’, and to have the will, the godlike confidence, the total lack of shame of a Napoleon. Raskolnikov gains salvation, antithetically, through his Christian compassion for the poor, the insulted, and the injured, through confession, and through a long period of self-effacing atonement.³ In *The Possessed*, moreover, the critique of egoism is linked with a bitter critique of anarchist politics in both its individualist and terrorist forms.

It is not so much, finally, Dostoevsky’s attachment to a mystical ethic which divides him from Stirner and Nietzsche and their anarchism, as his recurring Christian devotion to the ideals of self-abnegation and compassion. Only the Shestovian Dostoevsky stands without qualification as a generative figure in the tradition we have named anarcho-psychology: for the rest his politics, and in association his ethics, moves in a highly intricate and not readily decipherable motion around an axis joining the anarchism of the underground world to the chauvinist conservatism of his late journalism.

Dostoevsky makes his explicit attack on the postulates of liberal-rationalism, which he identifies with the image of *homo economicus*, in the *Notes from Underground*, since accepted as one of the seminal texts in the existentialist tradition. He develops philosophical themes whose intensity and persistency—they recur in all his major novels—suggest that his entire work should be read in part as a reaction against this ideology, framing what he condemned as Western, bourgeois, industrial society. We have already considered the facet of his critique directed against rationalist-empiricist thought. But this is inseparable from the second facet, which we now examine, that directed against materialist utilitarianism and socialism of both utopian and materialist orientations.

The underground man is, in the first place, anti-Benthamite. He attacks Bentham’s postulate (without mentioning or knowing of Bentham) that man acts according to his economic self-interest.¹ On the contrary, he argues, there is a force stronger than man’s rational will which sometimes makes him act contrary to his advantage, against the useful, and even against the beautiful.² Freud might describe it as one aspect of the death instinct; Dostoevsky, however, places more positive value on man’s ultimate weapon against order and stability—his whim, his caprice.³ Independence, and the semblance of freedom, are valued above other types of interest. The underground man is optimistic enough to believe that whatever man might think he ought to want, he will never really desire a utilitarian

³ Raskolnikov does not provide an adequate test-case for rejecting the egoist as a viable human type. His Napoleonic pose represents an example of the Will-to-Power of which Nietzsche would not have approved: it bears too many of the traits of the slave morality.

¹ *Notes from Underground*, p. 106.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 107.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

society: the rebel in him will finally prevail, the one grain of freedom he would have to sacrifice to join a materially secure, planned society would prove too high a price.⁴

The Benthamite ambition to *quantify* pleasure necessitates differentiating its components, a process which inevitably leads in the direction of setting up ‘pleasures’ as supra-individual ends in themselves, separated from the actor. Dostoevsky’s critique is directed primarily against this utilitarian habit, and against the consequent practice of consciously deciding useful goals and then setting instrumentally about realizing them. The *Notes from Underground* is fundamentally anti-teleological:¹

I agree that man is a creative animal, doomed to strive consciously toward a goal, engaged in full-time engineering, as it were, busy building himself roads that lead *somewhere—never mind where*.... But wait, ... I wonder if he doesn’t like chaos and destruction so much just because he’s instinctively afraid of reaching the goal he’s working for?... He loves the achieving, but does not particularly enjoy what he achieves.

The underground man, a nihilist in a nihilist world, observes his contemporaries striving to establish false goals where there are no naturally generated ones. While, like all men, they must continue to build roads, he argues that they should be conscious and honest enough to recognize that the goal itself is not an absolute, and probably not even very important. A strong attachment to the *telos* indicates that the spontaneous enjoyment the child once took in road-building has waned—his curiosity took him unproblematically along roads, which consequently defined themselves. A teleology directed to material ends has been substituted for the lust for adventure, variety, and play. Goals, *faute de mieux*, give a life shape and purpose; men become utilitarian out of fear of the alternative—the chaos of tangled or tepid desires, of rootlessness and boredom. At least it is possible on the level of judgment guided by criteria of instrumental rationality to believe that ‘useful’ activity is worth-while; Dostoevsky interprets the modern wave of rationalism, empiricism, and/or socialism as the issue of this intellectual drive to establish worthwhile ends. Whilst in London in 1862 he visited the Crystal Palace, built largely of materials from the Great Exhibition of 1851. He saw in this first of industrial society’s great exhibitions, showing the latest machines, factory processes, buildings, and so on, the chilling symbol of contemporary purpose, progress, and triumph—a ‘colossal idea’ signposting the technological paradise of the future, a terrifying ‘achievement of perfection’.² Dostoevsky links this sterile world of science and technology with the archetypal emblems of a materialist-utilitarian culture: he observed in Paris that the ubiquitous drive for *money*, and in association, status, had destroyed the

⁴ *Summer Impressions*, pp. 85–6. Dostoevsky’s optimism finds some historical support in Lewis Mumford’s account of reactions against the ‘megamachine’ society of, for example, ancient Egypt (*The Myth of the Machine*, pp. 228–33).

¹ *Notes from Underground*, pp. 116–17. Cf. Nietzsche on *Tourists*: ‘They climb mountains like animals, stupid and sweating; one has forgotten to tell them that there are beautiful views on the way up’ (*Menschliches* II:ii:202). Again: ‘Not every end is the goal. The end of a melody is not its goal’ (*Ibid.* 204).

² *Summer Impressions*, pp. 58–60.

ideals of the revolution—real *fraternité* had become impossible in a bourgeois society in which the self-determined *I*, wedded to the cash-nexus, was opposed to nature and to the rest of mankind.¹

The Crystal Palace is Dostoevsky's crowning symbol for the barrenness of industrial civilization. Virtually the whole Western world saw light, reason, and progress streaming in through its glass walls; he saw but the profile of a dark, satanic prison. In the Crystal Palace everything will be provided, man's every desire will be satisfied, he will be insulated from pain—but the more he becomes the automaton consumer the more he will also suffer from excruciating boredom. There he will become imaginatively imbecilic. Boredom will drive him to acts of the most vicious, gratuitous cruelty and sadism. The argument substantiates Nietzsche's genealogy of morals. The Crystal Palace is the supreme economic manifestation of the utilitarian, liberal-rationalist philosophy; and it is the bourgeois paradise. The ascetic morality manifest in the early phases of industrial society in the character-types of the capitalist and the rationalist social reformer prepared the ground for, on the one hand, bourgeois morality, and on the other, the chronic boredom of nihilism—both to be found side by side in the palace of glass.

Dostoevsky believed that the gods of rationalism and materialist utilitarianism had joined in conspiracy against all other ethical systems. There is a logic to this union. Reason finds its most effective application where a cluster of concepts is available which can be manipulated with mathematical precision. Any sphere of activity whose salient dimensions can be quantified falls under the iron grip of twice-two-equals-four. The accumulation of capital, or the acquisition of money, are endeavours *par excellence* which establish a quantifiable goal: hence they are directly amenable to maximization formulae. Significant steps can be taken here as in no other sphere of social action toward eliminating chance factors—hence positivizing the unknown.

There is a certain kinship of symmetry between reason and money. They both may bear a mesmeric power before which all other interests pale. Max Weber pointed out some historical links between the emergence of the Protestant ethic, in particular its emphasis on rational conduct, and the growth of capitalism. Moreover, there is an aesthetic congruency between the 'beauty cold and austere, capable of stern perfection' of reason,² and the magic and elegance with which money accumulates out of nothing, especially for the speculator who manipulates his financial interests through the Stock Exchange, and who thus is fully abstracted from the production process.¹

Dostoevsky's attack on utilitarian teleology operates in two dimensions. Firstly, teleological thinking is repudiated *in toto*. The critique takes its point of departure from the conviction that the only worthwhile goal for human endeavour is the supra-phenomenal mystical noumenon: the unspecifiable which eludes conscious pursuit. Secondly, the critique raises specific objections to utilitarian ends, the style of life they determine, and the consequences of materialism. The utilitarian ethic is viewed as symptomatic of the worst degradation of man's spiritual qualities. The hope of an expanded consumption of matter

¹ *Summer Impressions*, 'An Essay on the Bourgeois', pp. 70–87.

² Bertrand Russell on mathematics: *Philosophical Essays*, 1910, p. 73.

¹ Cf. Oswald Spengler: 'Next of kin to thinking in money, however, is mathematics' (*The Decline of the West*, 1932, vol. 2, p. 482).

is the surrogate for freedom of the spirit. This freedom is always clouded by uncertainty; and once the uncertain becomes unbearable the individual is driven to reduce its scale. (Both Nietzsche and Freud portray the individual most worthy of respect as he who is capable of enduring the greatest degree of uncertainty. The same is, in effect, true for Max Weber.) Dostoevsky accuses the liberal-rationalist of striving to fill in the spaces which are the trial of any man who lives by his inspiration with a series of infinitesimally close and predictable events, and thus reducing his life to banal, but comfortable, routine.

Dostoevsky backs his anti-utilitarianism with the claim that man can draw both insight into, and inspiration for, social action from the mystical. Alyosha Karamazov's particular experience, which he was always to remember in retrospect with 'someone visited my soul at that hour!', gave him strength to go out from the monastery into the world.²

The argument finds echoes in modern anthropology. Marcel Mauss, in his seminal *Essai sur le don* (1925), places a parallel emphasis on the non-utilitarian nature of economic exchange in primitive societies. The anthropology of Róheim and the more general cultural analyses of Mumford argue the same line. This tradition opposes the utilitarian assumption that the primitive chants as he sows seed because he believes that otherwise it will not grow, the assumption that his economic goal is primary, and his other activities are instrumental to it.³ The planting and the cultivating are no less important than the finished product. Life is not conceived of as a linear progression directed to, and justified by, the achievement of a series of goals; it is a cycle in which ends cannot be isolated, one which cannot be dissected into a series of ends and means. It is not our task to evaluate the degree to which this organicist perspective over-idealizes the past.

Freud gives support to the aspect of this tradition with which we are most concerned: he recognized that ritual acts are not essentially instrumental, but are motivated out of psychic need. They carry with them not a feeling of purpose, but one of compulsion. Nietzsche founded his rejection of causal thinking on a similar insight: indeed, his emphasis on the 'it' which initiates thought and action is singularly anti-utilitarian. Men rarely act rationally in the utilitarian sense of consciously planning the most efficient means of realizing a pre-determined goal: they are simply *driven* to act. This is not to assert that life does not usually obey an unconscious rationality, according to which action is directed to satisfying a self-preservative or homeostatic instinct.

A critique of utilitarian teleology and the empiricist, positivist view of progress simultaneously places some of the foundations of socialism under stress. Dostoevsky identifies socialism largely with social engineering, the pragmatic, materialist approach to improving the condition of man in society. The underground man rejects this prosaically atheist view of redemption: 'I don't accept as the crowning of my dreams a big building for the poor, with apartments leased for one thousand years and a dentist's sign outside in case of emergency.'¹ The credo suggested by this statement, taken with Dostoevsky's assertion that there are some truths which only the very poor can know,² mounts an unanswerable

² *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 427.

³ Also I.C. Jarvie and J. Agassi: 'The problem of the rationality of magic', *Rationality*, ed. B.R. Wilson, 1970, ch. 8.

¹ *Notes from Underground*, p. 119.

² *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 240.

attack on all radical social action. The social reformer's goals have been deemed irrelevant, and even destructive of the human essence. A type of individualist fatalism is present in anarcho-psychological thought, and particularly in the work of Dostoevsky: it regards social conditions as no more appropriate for melioration than biological ones. The only object fit for ethical concern is the totality of the individual's life, and what is then significant is the manner in which he accepts his fate. The ultimate value of human dignity is reflected in how a man lives within the confines of his necessity: to regard as unjust the fact that some men gain vast riches would be to upset the balance of things—these men are compensated for their exclusion on earth from the kingdom of heaven.

We are again entangled in the net of the half-truth. Dostoevsky's portrayal of the unique depths of warmth and compassion to be found among people crippled by poverty is convincing. It gives a more piercing echo to Blake's parallel sentiments about the Clod and the Pebble. *Crime and Punishment*, in particular, generates imaginative substantiation for the proposition that much will be lost when poverty is ameliorated, when social life becomes more stable and secure. This has the status of truth. But the contrary truth is no less persuasive. Dostoevsky also shows the degradation of these people's lives, the hysteria and the misery bred of poverty and sickness. There is no pure resolution to lead us out of the impasse of such conflicting truths. We are left merely with Nietzsche's own peculiar dialectic: the axiom that every step forward is bought at a great price, that unreserved optimism about human progress is based on a delusion (or, at the most, represents one way in which an individual in an exuberant mood channels his goodwill). Pure optimism runs contrary to what it is possible to know about the human condition. No clear blueprint for action is available. At the best the individual can choose how to balance the conflicting truths, according to his own subjective criteria, and then, perhaps, act.

The underground man impeaches not only materialist socialism—communism, social democratism, syndicalism, and anarchist variants of these—but also Fourier, and by implication all the utopian or millenarian socialists. Shigalyov, the intellectual in *The Possessed*, is associated, as a 'fanatic lover of mankind', with Fourier, Cabet, and Proudhon.¹ Dostoevsky makes many references to Fourier's utopian community, the Phalanstery, but they are never detailed, and it is almost certain that he is one of the many who quoted Fourier without having read him. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky was right to associate him with the utopian vision of the harmonious community founded upon principles of order and symmetry. The Phalanstery is designed to nurture, with the help of a neo-Benthamite device, the calculus of passionate attraction,² the harmony which lies potentially at the root of human interaction. For Dostoevsky, Fourier is one of the industrious ant-hill engineers, busy, protected by the delusion that his goal, the well-ordered society, is the summation of all his desires. Man at his best is a system-breaker, an iconoclast seeking not only variety, but destruction; as in Stirner's vision he is an arch-criminal, but not necessarily the gratuitously cruel one, driven to bestiality by the boredom of living in a palace of glass.

¹ *The Devils*, p. 406—using Magarshack's translation, but retaining Constance Garnett's more apposite title, *The Possessed*.

² This discussion of Fourier's philosophy draws upon his *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1966–8, *Selections from the Works of Fourier* (trans. Julia Franklin) 1901 and Frank Manuel: *The Prophets of Paris*, 1962. In this instance, *Selections*, p. 66.

Dostoevsky is not only reacting against an untragic, naïve view of human capability and human satisfaction; he also accuses utopianism of providing an intellectual escape from involvement in concrete, living experience, whereby the conscience is salved through a painstaking elaboration of gigantic paper plans for human happiness.

If Dostoevsky had known Fourier's writing he would have recognized a somewhat kindred spirit; the philosophy of this French utopian reveals an awesome imaginative range and force, sometimes manic and chaotic; often it demonstrates rare psychological insight. Fourier's life was rich in observation, of people of every age and type, of every trade and profession, and yet it was grey and undistinguished in itself. Thus, the seemingly paradoxical combination of a fertile and complex mind with an obsessive attachment to the utopian ideal of harmony, order, and symmetry is explicable as a compensation for a life which was at once dull and unstable. His philosophy magnifies this contrast: while he places great emphasis on the primary passion which he calls *papillonne*, the passion for change, alteration, and periodic variety, he sees it as only a part of a final, all-encompassing passion, Unityism or Harmonism.¹ There is a parallel significance in the fact that Dostoevsky too allowed himself a vision of utopia, not only in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. Versilov, in *A Raw Youth*, relates his dream of a Golden Age, inspired by a Claude Lorraine painting, an Arcadian world of happiness and innocence.² Alongside the Dostoevsky who relished chaos and destruction is a more timid, hesitant figure, yearning for some absolute, womblike harmony; here is an instability of genius not structurally dissimilar to that of Fourier.

Dostoevsky presents his final, coherent view of politics and social organization in the fictional form of the legend of 'The Grand Inquisitor'.³ Rationalist-empiricist habits of mind and the materialist-utilitarian ethic join forces in opposition to all that he considers to be valuable in the human condition. He poses a dichotomy between knowledge and liberty, between the flight, out of fear of the unbounded, into reason, and the capacity for the noumenal, for individual responsibility, for the caprice of the underground man. Knowledge is legitimated by political structure. Reason underpins the Grand Inquisitor's authoritarianism: once he has seen that men seek the tangible happiness of bread and miracles, and that they are afraid of the 'freedom' which the anarchist Christ offers, he applies his reason and his knowledge to satisfying their needs, indeed to maximizing their *happiness*—the emotional state diametrically opposite to that of freedom. At once the Inquisitor is the forgiving father, the scientific materialist, and the social engineer. He is the most compassionate, and honest, of politicians; he takes on great burdens of responsibility in order to protect his subjects from ethical doubt. But he also suppresses any attempt to expand their self-consciousness: he is the 'great simplifier', the shepherd to a flock of carefree children. Once the realm of the transcendental has been abandoned the politician is free to apply his equations: the greatest good is then calculable.

The underground man embodies the rejection of politics and its dictator. But Dostoevsky maintained his anarchism only momentarily. He himself impeaches Christ through the mouth of the Grand Inquisitor: 'It was pitiless of thee to value man so highly'. This Christ

¹ *Selections*, p. 61.

² *A Raw Youth*, pp. 461–3.

³ All references for the remainder of this section are to ch. 5 of bk 5 of *The Brothers Karamazov*: 'The Grand Inquisitor.'

has no answer to the world of politics, of rational action, of knowledge. He is utterly Nietzschean in his intention not to pity, but to respect. At this point choice between the Nietzschean position and that of the Grand Inquisitor is purely subjective, depending on the degree of optimism with which human potentiality is viewed. Dostoevsky, for example, finally rejects his own Christ in favour of the Inquisitor's type of political compassion. To discover this we do not need to consider the conservative politics, the slavophilia, and the hope for a revitalized Russian Church proselytized in *The Diary of a Writer*: Dostoevsky transformed his Christ into Father Zossima, who pities more personally than the Grand Inquisitor, but who remains half an authoritarian figure.

Stirner, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky, whether they articulate their views from the ethical standpoint of the egoist or that of the mystic, all develop a disdain for politics. Political affairs are regarded as banal, fit at best for distracting banter: 'Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out'—to recall the juxtaposing of love and politics towards the end of *King Lear*. But from here the ways part. The mystic, pictured from the egoist perspective, escapes from political reality into a world of religious abstraction; he should, however, be striving to transcend that reality in a politics of the self. He is truly apolitical. Shestov's atheist charge is that in the end the existentialism of the underground man is repressed, that Dostoevsky cannot face its nihilist implications.

On the other hand, for the mystic—here Dostoevsky—the egoist does not escape Thomas Mann's dictum: 'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms'. His politics is the anarchism which brings moral and spiritual chaos, which legitimates self-destructing egoism, the modern vehicle for the Antichrist. Although the relationship of the egoist to practical politics is not satisfactorily resolved, as we have pointed out, he is not guilty of splitting the world into matter and spirit, and denying all ties with the former. His dichotomy is between experience which is realizable, and that which is dissociatedly abstract. Consequently, in principle, he is better able to cope consistently, from within his moral standpoint, with political realities than a Dostoevsky, who, incapable of incorporating their reality into his world-view, reacts to the extreme of joining the Grand Inquisitor, though in sadness.

The either-or posed by the confrontation of the anarchist Christ and the benevolently authoritarian Grand Inquisitor defines the key ethical question behind any choice to act politically. The issues at stake have never been more lucidly formulated, whether they emphasize such dichotomies as democracy/autocracy, self-determination/paternalism, *laissez-faire*/planned socialism, liberty/happiness, or such notions as 'false consciousness' and 'repressive tolerance'. Christ answers the Inquisitor with a kiss. He utters not one word in reply: his silence is emblematic of irrationalism. The kiss is the only answer, and yet it is no answer. It merely serves to emphasize the unbridgeable schism between the conflicting truths with which self-reflective man *in* society has to live.

Some notes towards a psychology of *homo economicus*

An adequate understanding of an area of the past which is for some reason considered to be of significance to the present, such as the development of capitalism is for us, would include a psychological analysis of unconscious forces of motivation. Thus, whilst the historian must investigate the technological and social preconditions of capitalism, such

developments in Britain for example as the expropriation of the peasants from their own land and the expansion of colonial trade, he must also chart salient shifts in psychological needs. Moreover, a present which becomes interested in the psychological dimensions of its own problems will demand that history be written with a bias towards the logic of its psychological unfolding.

Psychology is like any other intellectual discipline in requiring some ordering principle. Weber, following Nietzsche, chose the historical development of Protestant religion as the framework from which to extrapolate psychological changes significant to the capitalist spirit. Scheler chose Nietzsche's category 'resentment' as the focussing lens for a phenomenological analysis of bourgeois society and its key psychological currents. More recently a genre of 'psychohistory' has evolved which grounds biographical study in Freudian principles.

We offer in this section a sketch of an alternative psycho-historical method, one which combines psychological biography with the setting up of Weberian ideal-types. It involves selecting character-types which embody nodal points of the social change under observation: men of the time, or, to employ Hegel's terminology, bearers of the *Zeitgeist*. Dostoevsky's recurring concern with the figure of *homo economicus* manifests itself in his fictional writings in the portrayal of a series of caricatures of this type's different vices. Thus the figures of the Rothschild and of the miserly, back-alley moneylender appear as the particular mediations of usurer traits. We choose, however, to illustrate our analytical technique by means of a third character-type, which Dostoevsky also identified with the emergence of capitalist-materialist society, and developed more fully: the gambler.

The aim of this section is to present an example of the type of historical analysis which an anarcho-psychological perspective makes possible, and to provide some evaluation of its usefulness. Dostoevsky's fictional analysis of the gambler joins Nietzsche's 'genealogy of morals' as the first detailed venture in applying the new psychology to social phenomena. It claims only to supplement, not to substitute for, a sociological analysis of *homo economicus*.

It is significant to the nature of anarcho-psychological thought, as we shall discuss in our conclusion, that none of its exponents, with the partial exception of Dostoevsky in his single work *Notes from Underground*, venture into a sustained systematic critique of the social and economic developments which they abhorred. The latter half of this section is devoted to applying one of their psychological insights, which characteristically eludes empirical specificity, as a critique of *homo economicus* drawing on concrete economic data in a fashion more typical of Marx's work. We justify this one excursion beyond the bounds of nineteenth-century anarcho-psychological practice on the grounds of the importance of determining whether this practice, in spite of its irrationalist preferences, might provide a basis for systematic non-positivist economic analysis.

Psychoanalysts have stressed the need to draw on studies of neuroses in making statements about 'normal', individual or social, behaviour, in the belief that neuroses are magnifications of determining traits present in all men. The assumption is that it is more fruitful to study a detailed film-negative when it is projected onto a large screen. Similarly, we search for insights into *homo economicus* by looking at his obsessions and compulsions, as they are expressed in the particular form of the gambler, again assuming that they provide the keys to the 'deep structure' of his character.

Dostoevsky's *Novelle, The Gambler* (1867), was written after a series of episodes in which the writer had reduced himself to poverty in the gaming houses of Europe.¹ He described the essence of his prospective gambler in a letter to Strakhov:²

But the chief thing is that all his vitality, all his strength, his violent temper, his boldness—are spent on roulette. . . . He is a poet of sorts, but the point is that he is ashamed of his poetry, for deep down he feels how contemptible it is, though the fact there is risk ennobles him in his own eyes.

Dostoevsky recognizes a powerful drive in man to squander everything he possesses in one ecstatic experience of pure risk—in this case to focus all his talents, his ambitions, his emotions on one number on one roulette wheel at one moment in time. This can only destroy: creative passion finds its concentrated inversion and becomes a compulsive force for self-annihilation. Indeed, by contrast, an implicit value is placed on sublimation, on diffusing passion widely enough for its object attachments to bear its intensity. In the gambler the erotic drive, unleashed as dramatically and with as little diversion as in the Wagnerian *Liebestod*, is displaced onto the roulette wheel. In both types of sheer catharsis we witness the masochistic element of the urge to give all, without a touch of constraint, and thus to be wholly possessed, and dispossessed, which here amounts to the same. The state of ultimate trust is precariously close to being the one of ultimate self-disrespect, self-abandon close to being self-negation—in terms of a connection which recurs in the *Novelle*, the lover close to being the gambler.

The psychological state of the gambler in full motion is intoxication. 'Feeling as though I were delirious with fever', recalls Dostoevsky's hero, 'my whole body tingled with fire. . . .'¹ Normal restraints imposed by the superego on instinctual energy yield; the exhilaration is intensified by daring the forbidden; an activated sense of guilt spices nervous excitement. Moreover, this rebel against his conscience is also a rebel against civilization: its order is impotent before the unleashed gambling passion. And the irrationalist Dostoevsky approves: he contrasts the gambler with the German *Vater*; whom he detests with his Protestant virtues of duty, frugality, and hard work.

The character of the gambler contains a strain of what was a perverse aspect of the alternative to ego-striving in *Crime and Punishment*: the impulse to deny the self, the case of someone deriving pleasure from humiliating himself.² The maintenance of a lucid sense of identity, of *ego*, is burdensome; it implies a series of responsibilities, a striving continuously to 'live up to' a certain self-image in the individual's own mind, and in the minds of his acquaintances. (The existentialist tradition would suggest that such a self-image is false, because it is forced.) A satisfying feeling of release follows the thrusting off of these burdens. The gambler acts out a personal assault on the core of the Protestant tradition, the beliefs in rational, frugal conduct and individual responsibility.

The play-drive in the case of the gambler is impelled by 'a terrible craving for risk',³

¹ David Magarshack: *Dostoevsky: A Life*, 1963, ch. 8.

² Quoted *ibid.*, p. 297.

¹ *The Gambler*, p. 129.

² *Crime and Punishment*, p. 298.

and is funnelled into one outlet. The curiosity which entices the child into secret gardens has ossified: what remains is the fetish of engineering one moment in which curiosity is to reach a fever pitch, then die. Curiosity, ambition, dream, and desire are dictated as if under a myopia of the psychic energy. Melanie Klein relates a case in which her teacher, Karl Abraham, cured a boy whose play-drive had been emasculated to the point where his only pleasure lay in philately: in clinical sessions he would ritually arrange, swap, and replace stamps.¹ The gambler is one of this boy's psychological twins. He has retired from a threatening world into one whose boundaries he can define. And yet he has institutionalized the very precariousness from which he seeks to escape.

For Dostoevsky, the gambler is Hyde to the mystic's Jekyll. The novelist is fascinated by this travesty of his mystical ideal. The gambler, like the mystic, knows that reason does not govern life. He detests the permanent and the material so much that he has to squander all that he possessed: he exorcizes these demons which threaten to possess him. The true mystic is indifferent to the material; he manifests none of this ambivalent love-hate for money. Twice-two-equals-four has more of a grip on the gambler; hence his fanatical rebellion, his turn to the game where the only recognizable skill is a 'mystical touch' which can intuit the roll of the ball. The gambler's success, too, is dependent on grace: however, it is the success which impels only greater failure next time. Dostoevsky himself, ever a man of clashing opposites, exhibits in his own gambling activities, and in his imaginative recreation of them, some symptoms of the mystic *manqué*.

The vision of the Midas touch, that everything can be had suddenly and for nothing, and this holds for capitalist and gambler alike, funnels drives in a way that can only shatter the pace of living in which experience is allowed to unfold in its own natural time. It is as if the delicate precision of a slow string quartet was interrupted by a frenzied and sustained crescendo. The self-destructiveness which permeates the gambler's character is highlighted in his incapacity to find any regenerative relationship to time. He differs from the capitalist, who suffers from a similar time-neurosis, in his compulsion to condense life's infinite number of dimensions of uncertainty into one experience: he has to cathart the unknown. We postpone discussion of how the capitalist copes with uncertainty.

Dostoevsky's critique is levelled from the standpoint of the mystical ethic. The mystic's search is also teleological, but of a different order. He waits, he observes, all his senses are finely tuned until the harmonies of the movement, the growth, and the decline of the objects around him, merge with his own inner rhythms:²

³ *The Gambler*, p. 132.

¹ Klein, op. cit., p. 125n.

² Rainer Maria Rilke: *Sonette an Orpheus*, I: ix

*Nur wer mit Toten vom Mohn
ass, von dem ihnen,
wird nicht den leisesten Ton
wieder verlieren.*

(Only she who tasted her own poppy-seed
with the dead, will not again lose the most
fugitive tone.)

On the one hand gambling, for Dostoevsky, is indicative of a type of sensitivity, a vitality and poetry of spirit, especially when contrasted with the passionless boredom of bourgeois virtue. But, on the other hand, it is an opium which destroys its addict. (The Stock Exchange was to introduce the same ambivalent gambling qualities into economic life.) The first symptoms of debauchery are portrayed in the case of Dolguroky, the 'raw youth'. The hitherto frugal ascetic hires a coachman, eats seven-course meals, regularly visits the hairdresser, the French tailor, and so on, once he takes to gambling.¹ The superego, having lapsed at one level, abdicates at others. Dostoevsky implies that gambling is one last feverish defence against nihilistic roots. Salvation is not available to the gambler: he sustains surging passions for a while, but they are the substitutes in frustration for, rather than the mediators of, a 'more real' promise. By the end of the *Novelle* the gambler has become rationalistic in lieu of passion: he plays all day for small sums, he calculates, and inevitably he loses. Once his vitality is sapped he becomes the pathetic bearer of traits that he detests: his gambling is confirmed as a last act of revolt against vices which are deeply embedded in himself.

Just as Rousseau blamed contemporary society, and in particular its Parisian manifestation, for the corruption of man, Dostoevsky impeaches materialism, and in particular the money fetish, for the degradation of the spiritual. The gambler stands half-way between the mystic and the modern capitalist, sharing both worlds. He has moved towards the rational investor in living out the precise inversion of his values. But as long as the gambler's irrationalism saves him from the Midas curse, he remains but on the threshold of capitalism. He comes full of enthusiasm for a money game, but remains fearful of the consequences. Drawn by capitalism's promise, he rebels against its means. He is fascinated by the goose which lays golden eggs, yet suspects that if he holds the bird too long he will find nothing but cold flesh in his hands.

There are different types of gambler, corresponding to the relative weight attached to each of the three attractions of the game: adventure, winning, and skilful execution. Dostoevsky's roulette player is the most extreme example of the risk-seeking adventurer. He chooses a game which depends wholly on chance—skill is entirely absent. The irrationalist invents betting systems which disregard all laws of probability (the rational laws), and in his contrariness he even reverses his own system. He is interested in winning, but success leaves him unsatisfied, and he returns to the wheel. The compulsion lies in the delirious state of climactic risk. Ben Jonson's Volpone himself admitted to enjoying the gamble more than the gain. Blanche, a cheap French courtesan in the *Novelle*, understands the gambling syndrome. She exploits the gambler's lust for an ecstasy which for him is inversely related to time, and inevitably followed by disaster. Indeed, he is as masochistically drawn by the image she gives him of the catastrophic deluge, as by that of the preceding climax.

¹ *A Raw Youth*, pp. 195, 276–9.

We now turn to consider, less speculatively, the place of the gambler in capitalism, and to enquire in what manner its functioning depends on exorbitant risk-taking. We are interested in whether the critique of *homo economicus* in terms of the psychology of his gambling traits has any relevance to the twentieth century. Our hypothesis is that although gambling, in forms playing a direct role in the economic system, has waned with the development of advanced industrial society, it has continued to provide a vital psychological undercurrent, influencing the emergence of new social and economic institutions. The case of gambling, which fulfils the function of an emotional release from the economic system, as conducted in marginal institutions such as casinos and bingo halls, is quite different.

Our main concern is the extraordinary extent to which economic life has been governed by the ambition to eliminate gamble and risk from its midst. The discussion hinges on the notion of *uncertainty*, which F.H.Knight distinguished from 'risk'. An action is risky if it leads to a set of possible outcomes, each occurring with a known probability; it is uncertain if its outcomes cannot be so predicted.¹ The gambler whom we have been discussing plays a game whose every outcome can be associated with a mathematical probability, yet he takes virtually no notice of this, and plunges into subjective uncertainty, applying the logic of his fancy. On the other hand, one of the major chapters in the history of capitalism's successful mutations has arguably been the mastering of uncertainty: suitable probability calculi have been devised which have progressively transferred 'uncertainty' into 'risk', which then can be minimized. A cursory glance at the proportion of its funds which a business enterprise today devotes to 'rationalizing' the basic processes of production and selling will illustrate this phenomenon. The trend towards 'specialization' derives from the need to employ the man of best judgment for each particular decision, he who will know which tools are available for quantifying the salient uncertainties. Computerized research, market surveys, and cost-benefit analyses have all added to the bag of 'rational tools'. Moreover, the drive to improve the power of prediction has led to massive outlays on advertising; the producer now seeks not only to improve the efficiency of production and distribution, but to generate demand for his product; he creates a market rather than taps one—we have the phenomenon of 'manufacturing wants'.¹ In addition, expanding the size of a company, and merging with like companies, may confer monopolistic powers which help increase control over the future course of events.

At the government level this tendency has been equally pronounced. The hallmark of modern 'mixed capitalist' rationality is national accounting, developed to facilitate the planning for long-term, steady economic growth. Mathematical-economic tools are also applied to the associated goal of choosing investment priorities according to analyses of social benefit against social cost, thus reducing the possibility of a misallocation of resources (economic risk for governments is registered in terms of an inefficient use of resources). The case of central planning in France instanced the combination of business and government interests, co-operation eliminating particular uncertainties faced by both parties—in general, demand uncertainties for business, and supply uncertainties for government.²

¹ F.H.Knight: *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit*, 1921, ch. 8.

¹ J.K.Galbraith: *The Affluent Society*, 1958, ch. 10.

² Andrew Shonfield: *Modern Capitalism*, 1965, ch. 7.

The war against risk-taking has been the preserve, indeed the *raison d'être*, of the insurance company. The importance of the role which insurance has come to play in modern life is indicated by the fact that in 1960, in Britain, of the 8.3 per cent of personal disposable income which was saved, over half went into life assurance and pension funds (the remainder being distributed between housing and other forms of investment).³ The notion of the commodity as a unit of exchange-value finds its purest expression in a fundamental axiom of insurance—every item has a replacement price. The ravages of hurricane, fire, even revolution in some cases, are quantifiable; the actuary, following a rigorous mathematical training, is the expert who can *rationally* assess the risk of virtually every earthly eventuality, and hence design a system for making money out of people's fears of 'chance' losses of property. The insurance company, in effect, gambles in *risk*. Even death has a replacement value; it is the norm today for a man to save during his working life in order to insure against ever-approaching death, through the agency named with disarming euphemism—*life assurance*. Life assurance gambles on the timing of certainty.⁴

However, the capitalist or mixed-capitalist economy is not so simply open to the progressive elimination of uncertainty, if *efficiency* is to be considered one of its important goals. It is possible to reach the stage of 'over-insurance', in which diseconomies are introduced into the system. There is an incentive to deliberately lose or damage a fully insured durable good, after the glamour of novelty has faded. Moreover, in a second type of case, governments which tender for fighter aircraft on a 'cost-plus' basis, in order to bear the risk of the uncertain cost themselves, thereby reduce incentives to minimize the costs of production. (Knight articulated the often-voiced fear that within the framework of planned economic activity, where uncertainty plays a small or negligible role, managers will tend to 'play safe', with a resulting 'arrest of progress and vegetation of life'.)¹ As a consequence 'co-insurance' has evolved: the insurer pays some stated part or proportion of the loss, as for example with some motor car insurance—the claimant pays, say, the first fifty pounds of the cost of repairs.² Thus, within the economic system of profit maximization (ideally, maximum utilization of resources), it has proved necessary to maintain certain levels of risk.³

The Stock Exchange has provided the institutional means of diffusing risk in capital accumulation; although it is possible to insure against 'loss of profits',⁴ insurance has played an insignificant role in hedging against uncertainty in capital formation and utilization. The

³ George Clayton and W.T.Osborn: *Insurance Company Investment*, 1965 pp. 18, 21.

⁴ In 1960, in Britain, life assurance companies accounted for £6,585m out of the total assets of £7,074m held by insurance companies—Ibid., p. 253.

¹ Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

² Although it illustrates the point, this example is not altogether satisfactory. Insurance companies have no reason to be interested in an efficient allocation of resources in the economy as a whole. They are profit-maximizers, and by this criterion could offer full coverage by charging a higher premium. While 'co-insurance' is in the interest of the society, it is not necessarily in that of the insurance company.

³ Moreover, Knight (*op. cit.*, p. 369) also points out that from the standpoint of efficiency it is fairly clear that men work more interestedly and more effectively for an uncertain reward.

⁴ Clayton and Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Stock Exchange's function of shifting and spreading risk was originally second to its role as a capital market; however, this latter function is almost redundant today.

At the same time, this central institution for damping the risks of investment soon became the largest gambling casino in every country in which it was established. With the expansion of the European stock exchanges in the nineteenth century a new avenue for making money became available to every man with savings. In the 1830s and 1840s in Britain the investment mania for railway stock provided the first 'modern' example of mass gambling. The first two generations of the Industrial Revolution had accumulated funds to a level far outstripping the capacity of the outlets for investing or spending them. In the end the great splurge on railways proved to be a gamble, with all its heedless and cavalier *élan*, which yielded only very moderate returns.¹ The landmark in the mass mobilization of credit in France, and hence the input impetus for capital accumulation, came in 1852 with the formation of the Société Générale de Crédit Mobilier. This bank, which by 1856 commanded combined capital to the value of one sixth of all assets quoted on the Bourse, also triggered off a speculation mania; previously untapped sources of middle-class saving flowed onto the investment market. Speculation was so wild at the inception of the Credit Mobilier that the difference between its lowest quotation on the third day on which its shares had been officially sold on the Bourse, and its highest quotation on the following day, was 735 francs—the initial value per share being 1,100 francs.² This teething time in the development of large-scale capitalist finance was also the period of the first gold rushes in America and Australia.³ It was as if a mass gambling hysteria seized this early generation, feeling its way tentatively, with impetuous thrusts and rebellious withdrawals, into the processes of modern capitalism. It was a time of youth, alternately carefree and intensely anxious; it was a time of exuberance, and a confidence which shrugged off the risk of squandering everything when there was the possibility of winning the omnipotence seen in economic fortune; the myths of the age were economic, and the institutionalized caution of middle age had not yet set in. In this genealogy, the last economic regression to youth came in the months preceding the 'Great Crash' in Wall Street in 1929.

Writing seven years after the Great Crash, Keynes argued that the 'best brains on Wall Street' had not furthered the proper social purpose of the Stock Exchange, which to his mind was to direct investment into the most profitable channels in terms of future yield.⁴ He commented with acerbity on the irrationality which underpinned the working of stock markets, likening the activity of speculation to the game of musical chairs—the imperative is to be seated when the music stops.⁵

Moreover, life is not long enough;—human nature desires quick results, there is a peculiar zest in making money quickly, and remoter gains are discounted by the average man at a

¹ E.J.Hobsbawm: *The Age of Revolution*, 1962, pp. 64–5; E.J.Hobsbawm: *Industry and Empire*, 1969, pp. 118–19.

² Rondo E.Cameron: *France and the Economic Development of Europe, 1800–1914*, 1961, pp. 140–95.

³ Marx regarded the gold rushes as introducing a new stage of development in bourgeois society (*Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, included in *Selected Works*, p. 184).

⁴ J.M.Keynes: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 1936, p. 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155–6, 157.

very high rate. The game of professional investment is intolerably boring and overexacting to anyone who is entirely exempt from the gambling instinct.

The proliferation of ‘rationalizing’ (in the Weberian sense) techniques, which we have sketched in these pages, has evolved psychologically as a reaction-formation against this gambling instinct upon which capitalism is dependent. This is not to deny the functionality of these techniques in terms of purely economic goals, but to argue that we must also take account of a second, equally important, pattern of causality: the motive force behind this ‘rationalization’ can be construed only partially in terms of the demands of economic efficiency and utility. There is simultaneously a primary psychological need, for a society as much as for its individual members, to establish a balance between the forces of order and chaos, between rationality/permanence and risk-seeking/transience.

When this balance breaks down social neurosis is imminent. In this respect, gambling and the drive to establish rationalistic teleologies, in their extreme forms, are complementary socio-cultural neuroses. The negation of a rationalistic teleology is the state of total chaos, its polar opposite. Taking *negation* to be the cancelling of a phenomenon by directly experiencing it, by living through its contradictions, rather than by merely dismissing it, then gambling stands as the socio-economic form of irrationalist rebellion against order available in Western, nineteenth-century industrial society. It was the gambler who, by taking up the values and the mechanics of the capitalist spirit, exposed some of the more prominent ways in which they masked forces blatantly destructive of the human essence. (An analogous counterbalancing in the reverse situation is also worth noting: the legitimation of rational goals is the means through which ‘civilized order’ might be imposed upon the frenzied anarchism of the gambler.)

Once the new vehicle that nineteenth-century capitalism had made available for the satisfaction of man’s play-drive, his need to prove himself, to live dangerously, and to seek glory had become, in Weber’s terminology, routinized and disenchanting, this crucial balance was lost; concomitantly grew the danger of too great a stability, indeed the danger of ‘over-civilization’.¹ The ‘captain of industry’, who had combined the gambler’s verve with sterner Protestant virtues, gave way to the bureaucrat.¹ Some of the turbulent social movements of this century can be read as attempts to live in the wake of this danger, and find new forms of passionate self-expression before the social repression of instinctual energy reaches crisis levels.²

¹ Freud, in his essay ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ (1915), describes the burdens that civilization places on its members, and the danger of socialization inhibiting their instincts too severely; these repressed instincts then break free at any opportunity for gratification (*Collected Papers IV*).

¹ It is illustrative of this transition that Huizinga’s theory of play, with its bleak prognostications for a society which had abandoned the ludic principle, should be followed only six years later by Morgenstern and von Neumann’s *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944). Non-utilitarian, innovative play was thereby systematized into the ‘theory of games’, with ready application to the rationalization of problems of social, economic, and military strategy.

² Erik Erikson stresses the use Hitler made of the prevalent scorn held by German youth for *Bürgerlichkeit*, for the well-ordered world of the ‘mere citizen’, the bourgeois (*Childhood and Society*, 1965, pp. 324–5). Similarly, a key component of the student unrest of the last decade has been its angry rebellion against the boredom of ‘over-civilization’.

Nevertheless, modern capitalism has so far managed to maintain workable equilibria. Just as a compensating reaction reduced ‘over-insurance’, so nationwide gambling disasters such as that of 1929, rather than inducing people to use money—now realized to have little substantial or permanent value—in a manner in keeping with its ephemerality, promoted the reaction of caution.³

We have outlined in this section some of the ways in which the gambling syndrome has played a prominent role in the institutional development and functioning of industrial society. We have not considered the phenomenal increase in *personal* gambling in, say, Britain in the last two decades. Detailed statistics indicating shifts of personal disposable income into the ‘consumption’ activities of ‘playing the pools’ and of bingo are not yet available.⁴ Clearly our notes have provided only the outline for a historical study of the role of the gambling drive, and specific attempts to counter it, in the development of industrial society; our intention has been to indicate the usefulness of such an analysis. We have suggested that the critique of *homo economicus* in terms of his drive to gamble might still be relevant, not so much because this form of adventure is still prevalent, but more because it fulfils a necessary, if in its extreme form destructive, psychological function which has been progressively denied. One of the inferences to be drawn from these notes is that a society which is seen, by a growing proportion of its members, to be too rational, too well-planned, too bureaucratic, in short over civilized, is going to experience to an increasing extent a return towards risky, more adventurous modes of social action, in the style of gambling.

The critique of the undialectical progress model

The Brothers Karamazov is epigraphed with the words:¹

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

The theme that creation bears within itself its own destruction, and vice versa, is at the core of the anarcho-psychological position. It emanates from the conviction that the fall of man is irreparable. Such a recognition of original sin permits, at the best, the muted introspective optimism of St John, re-echoed in Goethe’s ‘Die and be reborn!’, and taken up by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. This optimism is that the dark forces which course in the substrata of human life can be overcome, if only momentarily, by facing them—in Nietzsche’s language, by undergoing them. They may be transformed into an impetus for rebirth. An unambivalent notion of progress is precluded. The sense of the precariousness of human melioration is so acute that even the most utopian of the anarcho-psychologists,

³ The West German reluctance in recent years to revalue the Deutschemerk was rooted partly in an irrational fear traceable back to the savage inflation of the early twenties, which wiped out fortunes overnight.

⁴ This modern turn in gambling is in part an effect of affluence, and, in general, is not conducted with the desperate fanaticism of Dostoevsky’s gambler. Nevertheless, it represents the search for some excitement to compensate for the chronic banality of much of modern life.

¹ John 12:24.

Dostoevsky, has the stranger who joins the perfectly harmonious community in which everyone is happy, in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, inwardly driven to corrupt it.²

The notion of ambivalency frames the entire anarcho-psychological perspective. In the work of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky in particular, as later in that of Freud, love and hate, sadism and masochism, sanity and madness, projection and introjection, self-affirmation and self-denigration, lucidity and turbid silence, are respectively the reverse sides of the same thin coins. Christ is indicted by Nietzsche for bringing the ‘good tidings’, ‘precisely that there are no longer any opposites’.³

In the specific context of economic life, consumption and destruction are correlates. The child gains as much pleasure, although of a different kind, from knocking down a house of playing cards, as he does from building it; we enjoy the eating of a sumptuous meal, as much as preparing it; it may even be the case that the planned obsolescence of durable commodities satisfies a need of the consumer to keep turning over his possessions, not only because he prefers novelty but because he gains satisfaction from exhausting objects as he uses them. Eating may be taken as a paradigm for the consumption process: enjoyment is the flame which lives off the matter it destroys. Again, the moment of rebirth is the moment of annihilation. *Wasting* is inherent in *consuming*, as is borne out by the German language, in which *verzehren* means either ‘to consume’ or ‘to waste’.¹

Anarcho-psychological theory emphasizes dichotomies between play and work, the superfluous and the necessary, and wasting or squandering and usefully consuming, in order to expose the inhibiting narrowness of liberal-rationalist categories. These categories deny the significance, in the sense both of value and actuality, of the former term in each of the dichotomies. The counter-claim is that gratifying human action defines itself conceptually as mediating the synthesis of each of these three pairs of opposites. The capitalist spirit is accordingly charged, in anticipation of a number of modern social critics, with wrecking the series of balances inherent in the processes of creation, or production, and consumption. To choose a domestic example, the plain and frugal meal of a family strongly endowed with the Protestant ethic embodies its own rigid stress on functionality: by guarding carefully against material wastage the family ensures emotional frugality—little wasted, little enjoyed, at least in an immediately hedonistic sense. The criticism is not directed at man’s drive to keep himself adequately housed, clothed, and fed, but at a joyless, prosaic way of realizing this drive.

The ambivalencies at the centre of consumption and creation are particular cases of the dialectical nature of the human condition. For the remainder of this section Hegel, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Benjamin, and Adorno are taken as a collective representation of the dialectical critique of positivist habits of mind. On the question of liberal-rationalist methodology, anarcho-psychological and neo-Hegelian views run parallel. The critique hinges on the proposition that there exists a group of ultimately impenetrable, fundamental questions about human life, and that man is never more intensely and persistently interested

² *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* is included with *Notes from Underground*; p. 222 in particular.

³ *Antichrist* 32. The charge is, nevertheless, in itself unfair.

¹ The ‘potlatch’ celebration of the Kwakiutl Indians is a conspicuous example of the integration of consumption and waste in one ritual, which is of key social and religious significance to the community.

than when he is seeking their answers. It is a truism that a question once answered loses most of its interest value; the dialectical perspective deepens the point, asserting that answerable questions are by their nature superficial, and evade pivotal issues. Man is abundantly interesting, implies this view, where his essence is opaque and interlaced with paradox. Moreover, it is precisely the precipitate of these paradoxes, the expression in consciousness of subliminal psychic conflicts—the dialectical questions themselves—which form the molecular structure of a man's life. The dialectics of the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, for example, haunted Dostoevsky; they run as a *leitmotif* through his works, which, in these terms, now read as a series of persistent, elliptical attempts to penetrate a few omnipresent paradoxes on ever new levels of differentiation.

This perspective, in contrast to, say, Piaget's psychology, is interested only in behaviour which is 'important' to the actor; that is, behaviour which is emotionally charged to the degree that it is either frequently recalled, reflected upon, or day-dreamed about, or causes anxiety such that memory of it is repressed—and if the memory ever returns to consciousness, it reawakens anxiety. Such behaviour, it is claimed, stimulates, and is stimulated by, emotional currents which are always criss-crossing; this behaviour and its emotional environment can be understood only through the employment of dialectical concepts. A corollary states that science which is less discriminating in the behaviour it chooses to investigate gains clarity and distinctness at the cost of confining itself to the trivial.

This view of life as being innately dialectical is the crucial point of departure for our psychology of *homo economicus*, for in his lifestyle is found its polar opposite. The economic model is a progress one, whether it is geared to the individual's acquisitive drive, or to a national pursuit of an increasing gross national product. It depends upon a positivistic attachment to a unique goal which can be worked towards without any necessary regression or contradiction developing. Unlike Hegel's progress model of history, which moves by stages, each containing its own logic of growth and decline, the economic model develops as the simple function of one money-variable over time, with a long-term trend which increases monotonically.

'Historical time' is a concept of critical importance for the Hegelian view; it takes on the erudite sense of time as phase, or cycle of significance in history, rather than a linear sequence of equivalent units. One year, such as 1789, may be more *significant* than an entire century, significant in the sense of Benjamin: 'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of now'.¹ Moreover, the links between moments in history—the chronological term 'moment' is invested with a new and complex philosophical content—are so multi-dimensional as to prove impenetrable to value judgment.

It has become apparent that the dialectical and positivist minds are profoundly incompatible. The one reads the human condition as a net of unfolding contradictions, conflicting interactions, and even paradoxes, which can at the most be illuminated, never resolved. Through thought, the universe of man comes to be understood as ever more complicated and problematical. The other views this condition as underpinned by a deep and universal structure of simple, logically connectible elements, in terms of which the meaning of its totality can be induced.

¹ Benjamin, op. cit., p. 276.

Nineteenth-century economic advancement vindicated its progress model, and bestowed on it the charisma of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Events over the last half-century have exposed the inadequacy of that same model as a representation of human possibility, and intimated the degree to which its goals incorporate distortions of human interest. Nevertheless, its force as ideology has proved resilient against its own deficiencies; today it still stands in the advanced industrial societies, if usually unstated, as the dominant conceptualization of social hope. It may be that the sophistication of any dialectical model, and the cautiousness with which it views possibilities for human progress, precludes wide transmissibility.