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UNBELIEF AND REVOLUTION

LECTURES VIII & IX

GUILLAUME GROEN VAN PRINSTERER

UNBELIEF IN RELIGION AND POLITICS

lectures eight and nine from

UNBELIEF AND REVOLUTION

A SERIES OF LECTURES IN HISTORY

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in collaboration with
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Lecture XI. The History of the Revolution in Its First Phase: The Preparation (Till 1789)

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FOREWORD

The present volume is the second instalment of a series designed to make Groen's *Ongeloof en Revolutie* available in English. In this classic work, which grew out of a series of private lectures given in The Hague during the winter of 1845/46, the historian, statesman and publicist Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–76) gave an account of his “anti-revolutionary and christian-historical convictions,” convictions which had constrained him to disaffiliate himself from both conservatism and liberalism. For brief sketches of the historical significance of the book and its author, as well as for notes on the history of this translation and an account of the method adopted in editing it, we would refer the reader to the first instalment, *Lecture XI: The History of the Revolution in Its First Phase*, which was published in 1973.

The first instalment contained a pivotal chapter: in it, the author made the transition from an analysis of the revolutionary ideas in the abstract to a demonstration of their effect on concrete political events since 1789. The present instalment contains the two central chapters of the book: in Lectures VIII and IX the author traces the pedigree of the revolutionary ideology, outlining its evolution from the rationalism and skepticism of the early Enlightenment to the atheistic materialism and political radicalism of the last quarter of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. Groen's interpretation emphasizes the radical novelty of the new creeds as well as their fundamental hostility to historic Christianity as it had

moulded European man and society for centuries.¹ Of special interest to students of political and social theory will be the “more or less systematic” selection, from page 47 onward, of key quotations from Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. Taken together, the two lectures constitute a unique treatment of the classic themes of religion and politics and, more particularly, of theology and revolution. The thrust of *Unbelief and Revolution* as a whole is contained in the warning suggested on page 26, note 45, that secular liberalism is but an ideological way station on the road toward an atheistic society ruled by a totalitarian state.

Though not an easy book by any means, *Unbelief and Revolution* has drawn readers for over a hundred years. Since it was first published in 1847 it has gone through half a dozen editions, not counting five reprints. No doubt this continued popularity is due in large measure to the fact that it raises fundamental issues of abiding importance. Nowhere does this come out more clearly than in the two chapters presented on the following pages. A few points may be highlighted here.

Certainly the cornerstone of Groen’s political philosophy is his insistence, evident throughout these pages, that power and authority in state, society and family derive from divine institution and cannot in the final analysis be grounded in human approval or social convention. Taking as his points of departure the authority of Revelation and the sovereignty

¹ For similar interpretations, though not necessarily from similar sympathies, see today: Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: 1680–1715* (1953; French original 1935); Crane Brinton, *The Shaping of the Modern Mind* (1950; published separately 1953); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: the Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966); and a posthumous work by Christopher Dawson, showing striking religious affinity with the present work: *The Gods of Revolution* (1972).

of God, the author criticizes the Enlightenment for its belief in the natural goodness of man, its faith in reason, and its reliance on political innovation, in short for its belief that man has the right and the capacity to order life and society by the light of his own unaided insight.

In Lecture VIII the author develops the argument that where Reason supplants Revelation as the test of truth the logical outcome can be nothing short of atheism. In a few trenchant paragraphs (pp. 18–28) Groen sketches what he considers the inevitable downgrade steps in apostasy: from neology or the rationalist “reinterpretations” of Scripture and Christian doctrine, through nominal Christianity or “Christian deism,” to atheism, indeed a fervent atheism which chafes at the continuance of religious faith. In addition, Groen tries to demonstrate that without revealed religion morality’s only standard is enlightened self-interest and philosophy’s final wisdom is a crass materialism. Countering the Enlightenment’s corrosion of Christianity and its subversion of Christian civilization, Groen not only offers the customary defence of religion as the motive of morality and the cement of society but also points directly to the eclipse of “the Christ of the Scriptures” (p. 20), to the loss of “a living faith in Christ, bound to historical facts” (p. 22), as the deepest cause of the disintegrating effects of irreligion.

In Lecture IX the author argues that where human consent replaces divine sovereignty as the fountain of authority, there government can have no higher norm for the making of laws than the good pleasure of the majority. The ultimate consequence of this viewpoint is shown to be a society which in the name of democracy reduces public office to a mere agency of the people and restricts the function of representative to the role of messenger boy (pp. 50, 52); which in the interest of the community places the person and property of

the citizen at the free disposal of government and puts education in the hands of the state (pp. 48f, 58); and which under the guise of the separation of Church and State favours a type of civic religion that brooks no dissent hence destroys freedom of conscience (p. 59).

In these twin chapters, then, the author has identified *unbelief in religion and politics* as the root error from which the ideology of the Revolution could grow. Groen van Prinsterer's opposition to this ideology, however, did not lead to sterile reaction. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Revolution had profoundly changed the political structures of Western Europe and Groen's respect for history kept him from seeking to turn back the clock. Instead, speaking in years of fairly widespread disillusionment with the ideals of 1789, he proclaimed that the Revolution's promises of freedom, justice and tolerance were, as ever, possible of fulfilment, if only men would pursue them in obedience to the revealed norms of the Christian gospel (p. 10). Accordingly, he invited his contemporaries to take up the "precarious and precious heritage" of the preceding revolutionary generations yet at the same time to contend for the "highest truth" only (p. 16). This standpoint led him personally to distinguish between desirable democratic institutions and the false and idolatrous spirit with which these institutions are often infused by those who believe in the sovereignty of the people (p. 33). Finally, in his plea for making the most of the changes brought by the new age, Groen never failed to recommend the "life-giving source" of all true progress (p. 32), pointing out that many a recent movement for humanitarian reform owed less to liberalism than to the faith of persevering Christians.²

² In his serial of 1848, *Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Broederschap: Toelichting van de spreuk der Revolutie*, V, 21, Groen in this connec-

Observations and reflections like these contained seminal ideas which, in nineteenth-century Holland, germinated before long into full-grown Christian alternatives to the prevailing secular principles and programmes for state and society. *Unbelief and Revolution* is a major source document for the history of the rise of the Dutch anti-revolutionary movement, a movement which is perhaps best described as a Reformed and Evangelical manifestation of Christian Democracy – the European form of conscious, organized Christian resistance to modern secularism. Groen's classic work, backed up by many other writings and a long public career, was instrumental in bringing about a division of parties corresponding to a plurality of political *creeds* – an unusual alignment of forces which paved the way in his country for the development of a highly organized and institutionalized *pluralist* culture.

The response to the first instalment of this translation, communicated by students, teachers and others from a variety of English-speaking countries, has been most encouraging; within a year after it came out a reprint had to be ordered. With Lectures VIII, IX and XI now available, it is hoped that the publishing project may continue to win friends and thus be helped along towards ultimate completion.

The present publication owes much to many people. The first draft translations of Lecture VIII and Lecture IX were made, twenty years ago, by Bernard Zylstra and Jan Kunst respectively. The present translators are also indebted to Miss Ludi van Essen of the Rijksarchief in The Hague and Dr. Johan

tion singles out William Wilberforce (1758–1833) for his role in the abolition of slavery, Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) for her life-long campaign in behalf of prison reform, and Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) for his economic reforms in the industrial towns of Scotland.

Zwaan of the Free University in Amsterdam for their help in interpreting a number of ambiguous passages, obtaining archival material, and tracing incomplete references. For their ungrudging assistance we wish to thank the staffs of the libraries of the University of Amsterdam, of the Free University in Amsterdam, of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, and of the British Museum in London.

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Amsterdam, *August 1975*

THE EDITOR

ONGELOOF EN REVOLUTIE.

**EENE REEKS VAN HISTORISCHE
VOORLEZINGEN.**

DOOR

M^r. G. GROEN VAN PRINSTERER.

**LEIDEN,
S. EN J. LUCHTMANS.
1847.**

UNBELIEF AND REVOLUTION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Preface
- Preface to the Second Edition
- I. Introduction
- II. The Revolution Doctrine in Conflict with the Wisdom of the Ages
- III. Anti-Revolutionary Principles
- IV. Historical Forms of Government
- V. Abuses
- VI. The Perversion of Constitutional Law
- VII. The Reformation
- VIII. UNBELIEF
- IX. UNBELIEF (continued)
- X. The Revolution Doctrine in Conflict with Nature and Law
- XI. The History of the Revolution in Its First Phase: The Preparation (Till 1789)
- XII. The History of the Revolution in Its Second Phase: The Development (1789-94)
- XIII. The Reign of Terror
- XIV. The History of the Revolution in Its Third, Fourth, and Fifth Phases (1794-1845): An Overview
- XV. Conclusion
- BIBLIOGRAPHY
- Chronology of the Revolution
- Indexes

LECTURE VIII

UNBELIEF

WE HAVE NOW COME TO THE POSITIVE and direct exposition of the main theme of these lectures, the thesis that the cause of the Revolution lies in *unbelief*.

We have seen that the Revolution was not a reaction against the old order, for the constitutional principles formerly in vogue were both sound and indispensable, the forms of government were excellent to a high degree, and the abuses were neither so great nor so oppressive as to bring about a Revolution of the kind we are discussing. I have argued, too, that the perversion of constitutional theory could not by itself have been the cause. I directed your attention finally to unbelief, and devoted our previous meeting to the argument that the Reformation, rooted as it is in belief, cannot possibly have borne a fruit that so clashes with its principle: the Reformation was not the preparation but rather the very antithesis of the Revolution.

It is now my task to demonstrate that the Revolution, with its variety of schools of thought and historical manifestations, is the consequence, the application, the unfolding of unbelief. It is the theory

and practice of unbelief that shaped the Philosophy and the Revolution of the eighteenth century. A whole series of fallacies and atrocities *had* to ensue once unbelief gained the ascendancy.

Do not infer that I would thus teach some sort of fatalism. Or was Newton a fatalist when he asserted that by the law of gravity the apple *has* to fall once it is detached from its stem? As there are forces and laws in the physical world, so there are forces and laws in the realm of morality. And there are times when the power of men is indeed impotent against these principles.¹ Yet the irresistibility of the march of events does not abolish the personal responsibility of contemporaries. No one is compelled to bow before the idol of his age.² It is not his impotence to resist but his readiness to co-operate that will be charged to a man's account.³

And truly, to be convinced of the Revolution's inevitability in this sense, we have only to glance at

¹ "Once a strong impulsion, given to a whole people, has plucked it from the paths of custom to plunge it onto the tracks of change, no one can stop the movement. The sequence of events must run its course; the remedy against the evil lies solely in the full development of the evil, which will not pass until it has run through all its phases. In this sense one can rightly say that revolutions propel their own coryphaei and authors." Ancillon, *Nouveaux Essais*, I, 122.

² † Valid then is the Christians' *'Non possumus'*: "We cannot!" — "*I cannot do otherwise,*" was Luther's word and the martyrs' slogan. Today people say, "*It cannot be otherwise.*"

³ † "There are circumstances in which even the most courageous men find no opportunity to assert themselves; but there is no circumstance which can oblige anyone to do anything against his conscience." Madame de Stael, *Considérations*, III, 44f.

the condition of Europe in the preceding century as I have sketched it. The principles of constitutional law had been distorted: authority had been confused with absolutism and liberty with lawlessness. Constitutions had been debased, morals had been corrupted, and religion with most people had become hypocrisy, superstition or dead form. Given this state of affairs, either you must say that the influence of moral factors is chimerical or you must admit that the crash of the edifice thus undermined was inevitable.

Yet from this general assessment I would move forward without tarrying to the gist and kernel of my argument. The necessity of the Revolution can be established with far greater precision from an examination of its unique origin, progress, and denouement. What I am anxious to show is that the real formative power throughout the revolutionary era, right up to our own time, has been atheism, godlessness, *being without God*. It is this feature that has given the Revolution its peculiar stamp, in its essence and in its practical results, in its doctrine and in its application. From the unbelieving nature of the Revolution one can predict its history. And inversely, one can discern in the facts of its history the constant tokens of its unbelieving origin.

I spoke to you earlier about an "essay at biography"⁴ and I believe that this term applies well to the survey I intend to give you of the Revolution's history in connection with its doctrine. Yet I shall

⁴ [See above, p. 00.]

not begin that survey⁵ today. A *physiological* examination⁶ should precede the biography: through an analysis of the tenets of the eighteenth century I should first like to discover with you the *general laws* which governed the life of that century. In the biography to follow you will then be able to see how – inversely – the history of that century conformed all too accurately, sadly enough, to these laws. For the moment, then, I am concerned only with the *natural history* of the Revolution ideas: with their necessary consequences under any and all circumstances and in every revolutionary movement, given their intrinsic nature as well as their fundamental collision with the truth. It is only after this analysis that I shall turn to the actual events of the Revolution, there to direct your attention to these consequences as they were actively present, and indeed preponderant, in determining the way things went.

⁵ [Cf. Lectures XI-XIV.]

⁶ What I understand by a “physiological” examination will perhaps be made clearer by the following noteworthy lines of Guizot: “Facts properly so called – external, visible events – make up the body of history; they are the limbs, bones, muscles, organs, the material elements of the past; their knowledge and description constitute what might be called historical *anatomy*. But as anatomy is not the whole of science in the case of the individual, neither is it in the case of society. Facts do not just exist. They are interrelated. They succeed one another and engender one another through the action of certain forces that operate under the sway of certain laws. In a word, societies, like individuals, are also living organisms. These organisms too have their science: the science of the hidden laws that preside over the course of events. This is the *physiology* of history.” *Histoire de la civilisation en France*, I, 33.

Before calling upon the witness of history itself I should therefore like to let you see that as a matter of simple logic *atheism* in religion and *radicalism* in politics are not only *not* the exaggeration, misuse or distortion, but that they are in fact the consistent and faithful application, of a principle which sets aside the God of Revelation in favour of the supremacy of Reason. I should like to let you see, in addition, that because this principle contradicts the very essence and immutable order of things it is possible to predict, even without the light of history, the drift of events and the metamorphosis of the principle as it has continued to reassert itself.

This lecture and the following one are accordingly devoted to the argument that when it is free to run its natural course in religion and politics unbelief leads to the most radical doctrines. In a third lecture I will show how the current is made to alter its course again and again by the resistance it encounters in human nature and the natural order.

The eighteenth century lies before us for judgment. When I speak of "the eighteenth century" I do not wish to be bound to chronological precision. I do not begin with 1700 to end with 1800. What I have in mind is the era of that new movement of humanity, the whole epoch of that transformation in world history which, after a lengthy period of gestation, was born in the year 1789. What a subject! How momentous! How difficult! And how liable to divergent evaluations! I shall censure what is for many, even

today, an age to admire. How easily, then, might there arise against me a suspicion of pride, of superficiality, of conceit, of arrogant disdain even for that which deserves acclaim. Hence I feel more than ever the need to remind you once again that our allies from the past are many; that our principles cannot be shaken; that our viewpoint is grounded in history.⁷ I cannot repeat too often that my opposition to the eighteenth century is free of foolish partisanship. My opposition to that age is based upon my rejection of its anti-Christian principle.

I have no interest in securing a bill of indictment. I desire a fair judgment. And it is at once obvious that the eighteenth century must have contained much that was good.⁸ No age, however low it may have sunk, is entirely destitute of virtue or talent. In fact, sad times have a lustre of their own, for the splendour of things excellent is enhanced by dark surroundings, as stars twinkle the most brightly on the blackest night.

But I would not confine myself to this rather insignificant praise. In comparison with what went before it, the eighteenth century is distinguished. It can at any rate not be numbered among those periods of history that have been marked by a despicable indolence. In many ways its endeavour was an attempt to raise itself from the mire. Whatever we may think of its principles, we are cheered to see the

⁷ [Cf. Lectures II, III and IV.]

⁸ [The first edition reads: "... much that was *partially* good."]

spirit of that century banish provincialism, dullness and the self-interest which had marked the preceding years, in our own country as elsewhere.

The eighteenth century was justified in striving for improvements. Even when you dismiss all the exaggerations, there was abundant reason for discontent with the trend of government and the degeneration of the state. There were ample grounds for demanding important reforms in the name of justice and humanity.

In its quest for improvements the eighteenth century displayed an energy that was uncommon and, in the beginning at least, disinterested. As a result of heightened enthusiasm for what was regarded as truth and justice, all mankind's natural faculties and talents, alerted and mobilized to an exceptional degree, were dedicated to the triumph, not of interests, but of principles.⁹

The eighteenth century had no shortage of fine words and impressive notions.

One thing more. If the age erred in its choice of principles and lapsed from the path of reform onto the road of revolution, there is an excuse to be made for it. What had become of the warmth and fervour of the evangelical persuasion, which earlier had borne

⁹ † Guizot, too, after having said, "The eighteenth century preached doubt, egoism, materialism," added, quite properly I think: "in spite of its critical and destructive tendency it was an ardent and sincere century, a century of faith and disinterestedness. It had faith in truth, in humanity. . . . In this double faith it deceived itself and was led astray." *Mémoires*, II, 421.

so much fruit in deeds of faith? In its stead we find the spectacle of narrow superstition, or intolerant hypocrisy, or fondness from mere tradition for forms of doctrine. Is the ignoring of the truth to be charged solely to the age that ignored it—or also to the age that obscured it?

I hope you will agree that these remarks have done justice to its merits, for here I must end my defence of the eighteenth century. Its basic principle—the sovereignty of man, independence from the sovereignty of God—I consider radically false. With Guizot I say gladly that the age saw “a flight of the human spirit”; but I do not add, “its flight was very beautiful, very good, very useful.”¹⁰ Rather, when I consider how men began that flight by tearing themselves loose from the solid ground of unchangeable principles in order to soar without support in the airy spaces of speculation, then, if the image is not too trivial, I can only compare such a flight to a reckless plunge from an upper storey, ventured for a fatal reliance on artificial wings.

The upshot of the century was untold misery. A golden age was expected, an age of iron arrived. Of course, while progress and movement elicit less disgust than the sort of lethargy which allows only stagnation and routine, and while we would rather see surging waters than dormant pools, it remains a sad fact that energy wrongly directed is the more disastrous as it is the more mighty. The majesty of a

¹⁰ Guizot, *Cours d'histoire moderne*. Leçon 14, p. 39.

mountain stream in no way lessens the horror of the destructive flood as it sweeps across the countryside.

In religion, morality and constitutional law there was no progress, but regress. Men celebrate the advance of "enlightenment." Unjustly so! There were fireworks and torch lights in abundance. But sunlight was lacking. And without the light of the sun no human wisdom can make the field fruitful.¹¹ They that labour with intellect and genius to produce ideas and chart vast systems labour in vain when they withdraw themselves from the rays of the wisdom that is from above; when they renounce dependence upon principles and thus confound freedom of the mind with independence of the mind—a distinction which philosophy too must acknowledge. Ancillon's strictures on this matter are altogether correct:

Every power must be subject to laws. . . . So it is also with the powers of the mind. Its laws are eternal principles. . . . Ideas without principles are a lever without a fulcrum, and principles without ideas are a fulcrum without a lever. . . .

Between intellectual independence and intellectual freedom there exists the same difference as that between a ship without ballast, anchor or pilot, drifting at the mercy of all winds, and a ship that sails against the wind and even against

¹¹ One should read in its entirety the witty parable of Matthias Claudius [1740-1815] about farming, where philosophical peasants, convinced of the superfluity of "the influences of heaven," wall in their land and roof it over with a painted sky. "And the seed would not grow! And they tilled and ploughed and manured and cultivated hither and thither. — And the seed would not grow! And they cultivated hither and thither." *Wandsbecker Bothe*, V, 208.

storms and tempests, guided by a compass and the commands of a competent pilot. . . .

Relative to principles, the moral and political sciences derived more harm than benefit from the erroneous methods applied to them. While the purpose was to perfect them, they were spoiled. While the goal was to establish them upon solid proofs, they were unsettled. And while the intention was to make them more profound, one descended with them into the abyss of doubt, where they disappeared.¹²

To rightly appraise the fatal influence of this century one must keep in mind that it turned even good into evil.¹³ I am not referring so much to the abundance of material prosperity which fell to its lot and which it squandered, so that in this respect too it was rich in promises but richer still in disappointments. I am referring more particularly to all those ideas of *justice, liberty, toleration, humanity* and *morality* in which the age—like Satan, who can appear as an angel of light—had at the outset enwrapped itself. These fruits had not been cultivated on its own acre, but in Christian soil. For while one meets with faint shadows of these ideas in the keenest sages of classical antiquity, it is only in the Gospel that one finds them in their strength and true nature,¹⁴ and it is only the proclamation of the

¹² Ancillon, *Nouveaux Essais*, I, 172-178.

¹³ † “Every good thing turns evil when man highhandedly appropriates it unto himself in disregard of God’s ordinances.” Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution?*, p. 239.

¹⁴ † As I stated in *Le Parti anti-révolutionnaire*, p. 58: “Delivered from a fatal alloy, the modern ideas belong to the Gospel.”

Gospel that conferred upon them a popularity unthinkable in the pagan world. This rich heritage, once orthodoxy failed to preserve it, fell into the hands of the philosophers. And what did they do with it? For all their boasting, these treasures came to ruin under their stewardship. And no wonder. They wanted to retain the conclusions while abandoning the premises, to have the water while plugging its springs, to enjoy the shade of the tree after cutting its roots. Such expectations will always disappoint. Here as well. Plants that flourished on the banks of the Gospel stream could only wither when transplanted to a dry and thirsty land. But no, even in this metaphor there is faintness and inaccuracy. In the poisonous fields of atheism the plants degenerated into harmful growths whose brilliant colours and sweet fragrances concealed deadly toxins. The ideas I have mentioned—magic words with which men thought to summon up perfected wisdom and happiness—were forever trumpeted forth, yet they remained, for all that, mere sounds. And not only were the promises not redeemed: their very opposites arrived. For justice there came injustice; for freedom, compulsion; for toleration, persecution; for humanity, barbarity; and for morality, decadence.

Thus I do not subscribe to the final verdict of Guizot, who wrote, "If a summation were to be given and a definitive opinion expressed, I would hasten to say that the eighteenth century appears to me to be one of the grandest centuries of history, the one which perhaps rendered humanity the greatest

service, the one which fostered the greatest and most universal progress. Called upon to assess its case as a public prosecutor, if I may use the comparison, I would conclude in its favour."¹⁵ Nor do I speak with Cousin of "the new achievements which it added to the legacy of the preceding centuries,"¹⁶ for its hallmark was not to add to the chain of time but rather to break it, madly to pursue innovation. Much rather I say with Ancillon: "The sickness, the mania for analyzing everything, has caused it to be said of this century that it was more an age of reasoning than an age of reason."¹⁷ The eighteenth century has shown indeed how much, but at the same time how little, human genius can accomplish when left to itself. Did not Guizot say also, "We are living in an epoch of confusion and darkness both morally and socially"?¹⁸ What the eighteenth century has shown is that actual ruin follows hard upon the heels of apparent progress. And if I were asked to render my own judg-

¹⁵ Guizot, *Cours d'histoire moderne*, Leçon 14, p. 39f. — † Later, and better, he writes: "Of all the centuries, the eighteenth was certainly the most attractive and seductive, for it promised to gratify at once all that is grand and all that is weak in humanity. It elevated while it enervated by flattering alternately man's most noble sentiments and his earthiest penchants. It intoxicated him with sublime hopes and lulled him with soft pleasures." *Mémoires*, I, 6.

¹⁶ Cousin, *Histoire de la Philosophie du dix-huitième siècle*, I, 28f. — † Cf. my *Handboek*, 3rd ed., §§ 823-846 [where Groen, writing two decades later, gives his final assessment of the Ages of Reason and Revolution; for some representative passages, see below, Appendix A, page 31.]

¹⁷ Ancillon, *Nouveaux Essais*, I, 194; cf. *ibid.*, II, 34.

¹⁸ Guizot, *Mémoires*, I, 304.

ment in a word, then I would say that in every respect and on the broadest possible scale the eighteenth century has confirmed, but then in reverse, the promise that all things will be added unto those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

At this juncture I would have you notice the implication of my view for the appraisal of persons. You need not fear that my judgment will be harsh or unfair. To the contrary. The better one recognizes the power of ideas the more alive he is to the truth of the saying that people, like books, must be judged "in the light of their times." A kind of atmospheric intoxication can arise which for purposes of determining accountability can best be likened to a state of involuntary drunkenness. We are very much deceived if we suppose that men generally discerned, in a time of enthusiasm rather than sober reflection, all the implications that are apparent to us today. Coolness in the midst of general excitement is rare. As Burke has observed: "Men have been sometimes led by degrees, sometimes hurried into things, of which, if they could have seen the whole together, they never would have permitted the most remote approach."¹⁹

These remarks are important for discovering and understanding the causes of the Revolution. People are so ready to blame revolutionary writers like Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau for the rise of

¹⁹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; in *Works*, V, 232.

atheism and rebelliousness, and to blame revolutionary coachmen like Robespierre and Napoleon for the horrors of anarchy and despotism. And rightly so, insofar as these men through words and deeds took upon themselves a large share of the responsibility. Yet they were also the instruments of the age. The writers only uttered what everybody was already thinking. They were the spokesmen, not the teachers, of public opinion; or if they were the teachers, it was for their leading men a step further along a road of reasoning upon which it was impossible to halt in any case. The same is true of the men who held power during the Revolution. Borne aloft by the spirit of the age, they were subject to its drift. They could not resist the logic of the Revolution. They led because they saw things before other men did and promoted more forcefully what the moment required. They were less leaders than an *avant-garde* walking along a track followed spontaneously by all. At most they were leaders who themselves were led, driven by the surging masses behind them.²⁰ We must keep this fact before us if we would not judge their character too severely, if we would not extol their talents too highly, and if we would ascertain properly the nature,

²⁰ "It is a common mistake to attribute to men's premeditated designs what is simply the consequence and natural effect of things. . . . In general, even the strongest men are never very much more than the passive instruments of a superior cause which is independent of their own thinking and willing: finding themselves in the midst of a movement that is whirling society along, they hasten it; but they do not initiate it." Lamennais, *Des Progrès de la Révolution*, p. 109f.

coherence and potency of the false doctrines; if in addition we would correctly appraise those others who, though shrinking from extremism and calling inconsistency "moderation," nevertheless honoured the same principle and are therefore accountable for the error not just to the limits to which they were willing to follow it in their own doctrine and practice, but to the full extent of its development—for the whole series of errors and outrages which issued from the principle.²¹ We must keep this fact before us. And we must be convinced of the validity of one of the weightiest political maxims: *Principiis obsta*—fight the disease at the first symptoms!

Allow me one more comment, about what our view of the age implies for determining our duty today. We shall not break with that age. We shall not dismiss it as an interlude that one may skip over. We shall neither disparage nor discard the benefits which that age wrought in the moral world, like a destructive but cleansing storm. Yet at the same time we shall make absolutely no concessions whatever as to the acceptability of its treacherous basis. We shall not seek to save the future by modifying or moderating or regulating principles that are ruinous in their

²¹ † One could also assign too low a value to the influence of persons. "The influence of individuals—of their personal thoughts and free wills—is infinitely greater than the philosophical impertinence of some of their critics would today allow. History is by no means a drama that is fixed from the moment it begins: its *dramatis personae* create for themselves, for the larger part, the roles they play and the denouements towards which they move." Guizot, *Mémoires*, II, 263f.

essence. But neither shall we be indolent or resigned. No, we shall do the only thing that we are called to do: contend for the highest truth, the acceptance of which is a condition *sine qua non* if we would arrive, while excising the evil and utilizing the good bequeathed us by our fathers as a precarious and precious heritage, upon the sole road which leads to the happiness of nations.

Much of what I have now said will have to be corroborated as we continue our investigation, and much will have to be argued in greater detail. Yet a correct understanding of the essence of the revolutionary development is in my view so important that I felt the need to clear myself of any charge of bigotry or prejudice before proceeding, as now I shall, to elaborate my conviction that the Revolution is in its entirety nothing other than systematic unbelief, the outcome of apostasy from the Gospel.

My argument concerns *religion* and *politics*.

Lamennais writes correctly: "There are truths and errors which are at once religious and political, since religion and society have the same origin, namely God, and the same end, namely man. Thus a fundamental error in religion is also a fundamental error in politics, and vice versa."²² In the history of the Revolution the examples and proofs of this

²² Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. x. — † Cf. my *Le Parti anti-révolutionnaire*, p. 76f: "We are the anti-revolutionary party: that is to say, we combat the most fundamental of the errors that are at once religious and political."

correspondence are striking. The same declension is to be observed in the corruption of religion, in the deformation of constitutional law, and in the deterioration of political practice. In religion we find a Voltaire, a Diderot, a Lamettrie; in political theory a Montesquieu, a Rousseau, a Condorcet; in the praxis a 1789 followed by a 1793: Necker, Mirabeau, Robespierre, Marat.²³

The Revolution doctrine is the religion, as it were, of unbelief. It is the negation of everything resting upon belief, so that it affects not only constitutional law but also philosophy in the broad sense—the “science of things divine and human,” as it has been called. Thus I would fail to do justice to our subject if I did not speak to you first about the *philosophy* of the eighteenth century, in order thereafter to turn more particularly to its *political* theory.

The principle of this vaunted philosophy was *the sovereignty of Reason*, and the outcome was apostasy from God and materialism. That such an outcome was inevitable once the principle had been accepted is demonstrable from the genealogy of the ideas.

I hardly need remind you that from the outset the supremacy of Reason was postulated as an axiom

²³ † When mentioning the “affinity of theory” and the “logical concatenation of ideas,” one unavoidably aligns the person “who perhaps unwittingly carries about the germ of the theory” with the fanatic or miscreant who does not shrink from the most frightful conclusions. Cf. my *Aan de Kiezers XIV*, p. 19 [“What is at issue here is the malicious character of the theory, not the heart and conscience of its confessors”].

in philosophy. This supremacy rested upon a denial of the corruption of human nature. But where Reason was considered uncorrupted, Revelation could contain nothing beyond its reach, or at least nothing against its verdict. Thus Reason became the touchstone of the truth. Accordingly, it became necessary to seek out by blatantly human eclectic methods whatever in the Bible might be considered the Word of God worthy of God. The Word had thus to be ratified by arbitrary wisdom, and Holy Scripture, to be holy, came to need the sanction of human approval. It cannot escape the Christian that at this very juncture the Divine prerogative is already violated as man seeks to be rid of God and to be deified in His place.

In order to calculate the effect which must follow acceptance of the rationalist axiom, we have at hand a very simple device. The philosopher believes what he understands, believes only what seems to him to be wisdom. Now compare his stance with the apostolic utterance: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."²⁴ Obviously the philosopher will come to reject and to regard as foolishness all the truths that are taught by the Holy Spirit. If he does not contradict or ridicule them openly, he will

²⁴ 1 Cor. 2:14. - † In the verse of Nicolaas Beets: "Met begrijpen zal 't niet gaan/Neem het onbegrepen aan"[reason not, only believe].

at least be forced to consider them mere symbols, metaphors or allegories. He will soften the harshness of the Bible's language with expressions that are in his opinion more appropriate. He will twist Revelation or he will expurgate it. Through a variety of reinterpretations he will provide for the destruction of everything that is essential to the doctrine of salvation. I would point out here only the *necessity* of the accommodation theory.²⁵ I shall not enter into details. We know how the deity of the Saviour thus becomes the divinity of the Saviour, how sin becomes weakness, and depravity imperfection, and the atoning sacrifice an act of exemplary love, and sanctification moral perfection, and the wrath of God holy displeasure, and eternal perdition from before the face of the Lord fatherly chastisement, and the God of Revelation the God of Nature, the unknown God.

But how far does this go? As far as any individual's opinions dispose him to take it. There is no other limit once it is agreed that whatever cannot be reconciled with the understanding is to be considered absurd. You will not insist on an enumeration of all the systems of rationalism and neology. They are innumerable, their very variety disclosing the cumulative effect of skepticism. How could it be

²⁵ [J. S. Semler (1725-91), a pioneer in applying the historical-critical method of exegesis to the Bible, taught in his *Apparatus for a Liberal Interpretation of the New Testament* (1767), and elsewhere, that Jesus and the Apostles had for didactic reasons "accommodated" their language to the "primitive" world view of the Jews of their day.]

otherwise? How, for example, could anyone who denies the deity of our Lord by reason of its incomprehensibility *not* be on the way to denying everything in His appearing that was supernatural and miraculous? to seeing in His walking on the sea a perambulation along the shore by moonlight and in His death a state of suspended animation?²⁶ or, to come to the point, to dismissing the historical Christ altogether and seeing in the four gospels nothing but fourfold fiction or myth!

Thus the renouncing of the power and spirit of Gospel truth courses towards a Christian deism. Let us see if we can have a permanent resting place here. There is in this sort of deism much ado about Christ, God and morality. But it is idle bombast, a meaningless flourish of words. There is a Christ—there are many Christs—but he is no longer the Christ of the Scriptures. He is a teacher, an example, a sage, a celestial being perhaps, nurtured in higher spheres of wisdom and virtue. But he is no Son of God, no Mediator between God and men. So what's the use? Here the words of Pascal apply:

All those who seek God outside Jesus Christ find no light that will satisfy or truly profit them. For either they do not acknowledge that there is a God or, when they do, it is of no use to them. For they fashion for themselves a means of communicating without a mediator with the God whom they have learned to know without a mediator. Accordingly, they fall

²⁶ [These and similar views were actually expressed by H. E. G. Paulus (1761-1851) in his *Life of Jesus* (1828).]

either into atheism or into deism, both of which are held by the Christian religion in almost equal abhorrence. All our happiness, our strength, our life, our light, our hope is in Jesus Christ. Outside of Him there is nothing for us but vice, misery, darkness, despair, and we find in God's nature and in our own nothing but incomprehensibility and confusion.²⁷

Is it not possible, however, that the believing and incisive Pascal exaggerates when he places deism on a level with atheism? For is it not true, after all, that the confession of deism, while it rejects much, can go very well together with a certain respect for the remainder of Revelation? And although it refuses to acknowledge God in the Law and in the Gospel, is it not true that deism does profess to honour and worship Him in Nature? – No, men only deceive themselves with such reassurances. Where Reason exalts itself above Revelation the latter must shortly be reduced to a compilation of legends and fables. And Nature itself, once men are blind to the light of Revelation, can always be explained purely in terms of natural forces. And at last even the Deity becomes a mere abstraction, a hypothesis, a hypothetical god: for if men, in order to believe, must first comprehend, what is more incomprehensible, what is more unbelievable, than God! It is not without justification that Lamennais writes:

When one comes to examine closely the system of the deists, one finds in it only incoherence and contradiction. Nature seems to speak a different language to each of them. They

²⁷ [Cf. *Pensées*, 244-246; or in other editions: 543-556.]

seem unable to agree on a single form of worship or a single article of faith. Forced to concede to reason all or nothing, dogmas escape them, morality slips away from them and, whatever they may do, they are pushed as far as the toleration of atheism, . . .²⁸

Bossuet therefore gave a correct definition: "Deism is only atheism in disguise."²⁹ It is a definition given already in the Bible: "Ye were without Christ, . . . having no hope, and *without God* in the world."³⁰

But Lamennais said that "morality slips away from them." Is that true? Must the practice decline with the doctrine? Indeed it must. For we know, do we not? and we confess, that there can be no Christian life without a living faith in Christ, bound to historical facts—call them points of doctrine or not.³¹ Although doctrine has come to be discredited with many, who in this respect deny the unity of root, stem and fruit, we trust that few, in this country at least, would go so far as to assert that faith in God can be dispensed with as the foundation of morality.³²

Still, someone may demur, morality as such has been an object of respect for some of the atheists who have styled themselves *philosophes*. True

²⁸ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. vi.

²⁹ Quoted in Lamennais, *ibid.*, ch. v. — † Vinet too writes, "Deism is only atheism in a sugar coat." *L'Education*, p. 344.

³⁰ Eph. 2:12.

³¹ [The first edition reads: "... that the Christian life is inseparably bound to a living faith in historical facts—call them points of doctrine or not."]

enough. Even atheists will gladly say,³³ "The essence of religion consists in practice: a man must be upright, merciful, humane and charitable."³⁴ It is only a pity that this asseveration does not help: "Experience proves that as soon as morality is considered independently of religion it becomes as problematic as religion itself."³⁵ "Deism's morality, like its doctrine, is all opinion, all cant. The whole duty of the atheist is to acknowledge no duties. 'Properly speaking,' says a celebrated philosopher, 'there is but one duty, which is to make oneself happy.'³⁶ One shall be free to do all, as one is free to believe all and to deny all."³⁷

Accordingly, there can be no basis for obligation beyond enlightened self-interest. And where there is no belief in God, what must the prescriptions of self-

³² † An *independent* morality is the ideal of present-day philosophy. Yet alas: "To the people, morality separated from religion means nothing, absolutely nothing. They will simply never connect the idea of duty to anything other than the idea of God. . . . To wish to give the people a morality independent of religion is to my mind the most chimerical of chimeras. In point of fact, there is a true morality without religion for neither the rich nor the poor. The rich will always have some means at their disposal to enable them to imagine the contrary; but the illusion will never spread to the lower classes." Vinet, *L'Education*, p. 111.

³³ [The first edition reads: "Atheists, to keep a place in society, will gladly say: . . ."]

³⁴ Rousseau, *Lettre à M. de Beaumont* [Archbishop of Paris], p. 59; as quoted in Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. v.

³⁵ Lamennais, *ibid.*, ch. iv.

³⁶ Raynal, *Histoire philosophique*, bk. XIX.

³⁷ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. vii.

interest be? Virtue is but a word, an affectation, a dupery. And authority and law, what are they? Cunning contrivances of the weaker, fashioned to constrain the loftier talents of genius. Much better, therefore, to live in harmony with nature: '*Naturae vivere convenienter oportet*'!³⁸ But such naturalism conforms to what the apostle calls a wisdom that is not from above, but that is earthly, natural, devilish.³⁹ "Man's duties are reconciled with his inclinations; or rather, his inclinations are made the sole measure of his duties."⁴⁰

In this shipwreck of truths even the last plank which men might clutch at perishes. In vain would they cling to a belief in the immortality of the soul, or to any real distinction between good and evil. For their philosophy preserves only the positive, and it regards as positive only the material—that which is within the reach of the senses. The Christian faces suffering and death cheerfully, his eyes fixed not on things that are seen but on things that are not seen: "for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal."⁴¹ Not so the philosopher. By inverting the order of things he proves himself a true revolutionary at this point, too. To him, things invisible and eternal are daydreams:

³⁸ [This precept, which is the sum of Stoic wisdom, is found in Horace, *Epist.*, I, 10, 12 and Cicero, *De Officiis*, III, 3, 13.]

³⁹ [Cf. James 3:15 (ASV).]

⁴⁰ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. iv.

⁴¹ II Cor. 4:18.

nothing is real if not visible and temporal. Thus Bolingbroke deprecates the view of any who would claim to have “a moral sense, that is, an instinct by which they distinguish what is morally good from what is morally evil, and perceive an agreeable or disagreeable intellectual sensation accordingly . . .” “There is such a moral sense,” he says, “which may be acquired in some sort by long habits of virtue, and the warmth of true philosophical devotion, but which it is whimsical to assume to be natural.”⁴² So nothing remains, save to say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”⁴³

And so, step by step, men are dragged to the abyss. Reason, granted supremacy, must be obeyed. Many, however, shrink from being *consistent at any price*. They waver. Halfway down the slope they would quit. Their inconsequence becomes noticeable. “Inconsistency is ever the companion of error, because man never weans himself from all truths at once and because the truths that he retains, incompatible with the error, force him in the end to contradict himself. . . . One escapes the atheism to which the system leads only by multiplying contradictions.”⁴⁴ But such arbitrary recalcitrance cannot

⁴² Bolingbroke, *Works*, IV, 16; V, 109; quoted in Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. v.

⁴³ [I Cor. 15:32.] † “Every stopping place in rationalism is arbitrary.” Renan, *Etudes d'histoire religieuse*, p. 378. — “Once one has dismissed Revelation to listen only to Reason, deism is cowardice of thought: one should move on to pantheism.” De Pressensé, *Conférences sur le Christianisme*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. iv. [Adapted.

withstand the dictates of logic for very long. The error is appealing not just because of its deceptive appearance, which it owes to the elements of truth it arrogates to its own use: it captivates especially because once its principle is granted, every step in its further development has the virtue of relative truth. Thus what many will shun, others will carry forward as a compelling consequence. Where most will shuffle along reluctantly, others will drive ahead. The ones who are utterly convinced, supported as they are by relative truth, will falter at nothing. Here lies the secret of the error's triumphant power. Where all questions are decided by opinion, by intellectual comprehension, all opinions are equal; and whoever can complement the corruption of the human heart with cogent reasoning and strict logic will therefore carry the day. How can any truth remain unassailed? Does not the highest truth, which is from God, remain fixed forever as the foundation of all truths religious and moral? Deny the foundation: the series of errors flowing from that one error will assume the appearance of truth, while every truth will seem falsehood, misunderstanding, prejudice, superstition.⁴⁵

Lamennais has: "Rousseau escapes the atheism to which his system leads him . . ."]

⁴⁵ † Cf. my *Grondwetherziening*, p. 51f: "Law, morality and belief are adjudged prejudices by which the free course of universal perfectibility is obstructed. The most remarkable, indeed the most awesome thing about these [revolutionary] doctrines, once you are pleased to notice the *source* of the universally accepted Revolution principle, is not their fallacy but their irrefutable correctness: where there is *no belief in the living God*, socialists, communists, atheists, the

To prove this, if that were necessary, I could now go on to show you in the writings of the English deists, in the attacks launched by Voltaire, in Rousseau's deistic notions, in the atheism of Diderot, in the materialism of Helvetius, in La Mettrie's *Man: A Machine* and in Condillac's *Man: A Statue* the progression, the descent, the slide into the pit, of the unbelieving philosophy. But to do so would be superfluous, notorious as this train of witnesses is. Instead, let me just remark at this point that to deny the truth is also of necessity to despise and to hate actively—not just philosophically, but militantly—everything that is adjudged false and therefore evil. And the Gospel and Christian belief are certainly false and evil from the viewpoint of the unbelieving philosophy. Once denied, revealed truths are superstitions. They are evils. They are the worst of the impediments blocking the road to enlightenment and self-perfection. Thus Rousseau finds himself writing:

Revelations only degrade God, by ascribing human passions to Him. I observe that, far from clarifying our conceptions of the Great Being, specific dogmas only muddle them; far from ennobling them, they debase them; to the inconceivable mysteries that surround Him they add absurd contradictions; they render man haughty, intolerant, cruel; instead of bringing peace on earth, they bring fire and sword. I ask myself what all this is good for, and I find no answer. I see in it nothing but

champions of the Republic of the colour of blood, are in the right. Only when he keeps this revolutionary consistency in mind can one account for the fanaticism which regards realization of the doctrine as the most noble mission, resisting it as the most culpable crime."

the crimes of men and the miseries of mankind.⁴⁶

Let us not forget: the lie is compelled to hate the truth and to proscribe it because it is in the nature of the truth to be exclusive, to be intolerant of the lie. The very presence of the truth is condemnation of the error. So the lie, when it is complete, embraces every remnant of the truth within the circle of its hatred. Deism, however diluted, is an offence to the atheist. Whoever believes in a God, of whatever description, is in the estimate of the atheist a bigoted proponent of childish and harmful ideas. Because atheism equalizes all religions, people believe they can rely on it to be tolerant. They are mistaken. Atheism cannot tolerate the truth, because it cannot be tolerated by the truth. It recognizes a mortal enemy in every belief. It puts up with the least hint of that religion only that keeps silent, that bends its neck, that submits to the rules and regulations of unbelief. Atheism equalizes all religions all right—provided all are equally destitute of the signs of vigour and life. Its tolerance is not unlike that of a murderer towards his enemy, once the victim is dead.

It is this enmity that we must bear in mind if we are to understand the nature of the Revolution. The learned and discerning Albrecht von Haller, who was as anti-revolutionary as his grandson but at the same time a simple Christian who did not look to the Vatican for the Gospel light that kindled in his

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, III, 133; as quoted in Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. v.

soul,⁴⁷ noted as early as 1759:

Among the most outspoken of the freethinkers we observe a spirit of persecution as violent as it could ever be with a Dominican, although *for lack of opportunity* it can find expression only in abusive language. Zealots as ardent as Helvetius and Voltaire would persecute and even have *blood shed on the scaffolds* if they had the power to do so.⁴⁸

Burke writes:

Religion is among the most powerful causes of enthusiasm. When anything concerning it becomes an object of much meditation, it cannot be indifferent to the mind. They who do not love religion, hate it. The rebels to God perfectly abhor the author of their being. They hate him “with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, and with all their strength”. . . . This fanatical atheism left out, we omit the principal feature in the French revolution . . .⁴⁹

The defining feature of the Revolution is its hatred of the Gospel, its anti-Christian nature. This feature marks the Revolution, not, mind you, when it “deviates from its course” and “lapses into excesses,” but, on the contrary, precisely when it holds to its course and reaches the conclusion of its system, the true end of its logical development. This mark belongs to the Revolution. The Revolution can never

⁴⁷ [Karl Ludwig von Haller (1768-1854), author of the *Restauration* so frequently quoted here, converted to Catholicism in 1821.]

⁴⁸ Albrecht von Haller (1708-77), in a review of Helvetius' *De l'Esprit*, in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeiger*, 1759, p. 1034; as quoted in Karl Ludwig von Haller, *Restauration*, I, 126n.

⁴⁹ Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*; in *Works*, VIII, 165-167.

shake it off. It is inherent in its very principle, and expresses and reflects its essence. It is the sign of its origin. It is the mark of hell.⁵⁰

I could go on to show you how the same principle of unbelief operated in philosophy proper—the more profound, or perhaps fanciful, discipline—, in the various branches of learning, and even in belles-lettres. I could show you in the systems of the German metaphysicians, in the criticism of the texts of classical antiquity, and in the new treatment of history, how even the indubitable was made the object of doubt. I could show you how literature, after serving as a vehicle for too much foolishness and mal-eficence, ended by earning the appellation “literature of despair.”⁵¹ It would be inadvisable for us to enter unnecessarily upon by-paths, however, since our time is limited. By omitting whatever does not belong directly to our subject I shall be able in the next lecture to turn at once to political theory, to show you on this ground, too, how being without God in the world entails certain natural consequences: how when the bond between heaven and earth is severed proud man becomes the helpless prey of destruction and ruin.

⁵⁰ † *Atheism becomes pantheism and the deification of man.* In its struggle against Revelation and Christian belief, atheism grows into idol worship. [*This note is continued in Appendix B, page 34, below.*]

⁵¹ † Cf. Vinet, *Chrestomathie française*, III, lxxxii: “a literature which in more than one sense breathes despair.”

APPENDICES TO LECTURE VIII

APPENDIX A: Groen's final assessment of the Ages of Reason and Revolution. *Handboek*, 3rd ed., 1865, §§ 823-846. See note 16, page 12, above.

... In the bitter fruits of the continued practice were visible the nature and effect of the Revolution – and of God's judgment: "My people would not hearken to my voice, so I gave them up to their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels" [Psalm 81:11, 12].

In the judgment there lay also a blessing... Defective and lifeless forms pertaining to all sorts of wrongs and abuses were swept away. The way was cleared for thorough-going measures.

One may not ignore the many good things that were achieved during this period. The efforts for reform and renewal were not unfruitful. There was remarkable material and intellectual progress and development. To a degree that would not have been thought possible, the forces of nature were made serviceable to human ingenuity. Many social improvements were brought about. And in the basic features of the [new] political forms lay the germ of civil and political liberty.

Even so, the progress that was made in the areas of law and morality is to be attributed largely to the work of the Gospel. The history of Europe and especially of the Netherlands in the days of the Reformation had shown experimentally the power of saving truth for emancipation and civilization. And although this power was afterwards assigned to obscurity through the powerlessness of a dead orthodoxy, the improvements realized even then prove that only the Gospel contains the true principle of liberty, equality and fraternization, of philanthropy and efficacious humanitarianism.

For the philosophy of the age, despite the anti-Christian character of its main tenet, was permeated with the precepts of Christian morality and the marrow of Christian civilization... The pity is that most men wanted to have the fruit without the root, the morality without the motive. *Faith which worketh by love* [Gal. 5:16]? no. *Love*, yes; but not *faith*. Love as it is *in man*, not as it is *of God*.

Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). The ideas that made [eighteenth-century] philosophy so

attractive were of Christian origin; they were wholesome insofar as they were gotten from the Gospel, baneful insofar as they were torn loose from it.

In Christian love lies true humanity: recognition of the rights of man, even of the humblest, without distinction of race or colour or birth or class. From this follow (as the eighteenth century took to heart with commendable zeal) the abolition of slavery, of serfdom and of the rack; toleration in religion; the extension of political rights to the lower classes; numerous philanthropies; and the intent to secure an adequate standard of living for all. Formerly, European Christendom had been motivated in its public order too exclusively by the first of the great commandments, *Thou shalt love thy God*, and by the enforcement of the laws pertaining to its observance. Now however, as men seized upon the commandment *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, they thrust piety aside. Philanthropy was torn loose from its life-giving source. This explains why so many a noble cause met a miserable end and why so much that is vaunted as an achievement of the progress of enlightenment was in reality accomplished only through the faith and persistence of Christians.

Men wanted to be *like God*, not *under God*. They spoke no longer of sin but of an undepraved and educable, perfectible humanity. . . .

Such perfectibility found its slogan in the promise of the serpent in Paradise: "ye shall be as God" (Gen. 3:5 [ASV]). — "*The Revolution* is the spirit of revolt against all authority (II Thess. 2:4), appearing in world history as a *ruling principle* for the first time in the *French revolution*" (Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye).

At bottom the Revolution is the world-historical *war of religion* (Gen. 3:15), the battle against the living God. — Piety and politics melt together before this supreme question: if there is no *sin*, there is no *Saviour*; if there is no *sin*, the cause of evil lies not in man, who is good, but in the *form of government*, in the lack of popular rule, in the corruption of society through priestcraft and tyranny. . . .

Where no supreme lawgiver is recognized, where no moral authority governs man, there is no sanctity of office, no independence of government, no support save in the will of the people, no inviolability of property. Liberalism gives way to radicalism and . . . is genealogically related to communism and socialism. . . .

Authority, in the state and in every relationship, has a source higher than the human will. The moment this *divine right* of govern-

ment is denied and sovereignty *by the grace of God* repudiated—the moment there is no *legitimacy*, no justice based on unshakable foundations, but instead *legality*, a justice based only on the inconstancy of man-made law—at that moment there is no barrier against the Revolution, even in its uttermost madness. . . .

That every experiment with the revolutionary system failed was not due to the deficiency of the forms of government. Far from it. Separated from the false theory, the type of government which developed amidst the revolutionary turbulence had as its main objective common deliberation between government and people as the guarantee of civil and political liberty. As far as our country is concerned, this development was in line with the natural evolution of the nation, and was not only preferable to what existed before 1795 but capable also of meeting every new demand of constitutional progress.

“The spirit of the age is one thing, its career another” (Isaac da Costa). One should indeed distinguish between the *Revolution spirit*, which is the implacable enemy of civil and international order, and the political *state of affairs* which has arisen under the influence of the Revolution. “On the ground which the revolution has laid waste a new seed is sprouting after laws of its own” (Johan Rudolf Thorbecke). The real progress made by European constitutional law consists in the shift away from the originally *patrimonial* nature of the European kingdoms; in the diffusion of the conviction that every state ought to be a public affair, a *res publica*, a society for the *common weal*. In this genuinely republican and no longer private-civil character of the state — which is at once disparate to the ills of popular sovereignty and quite compatible with an independent and powerful monarchy—lie the precondition, the life principle and the vital force of a Netherlandic and constitutional monarchy comparable in sense and spirit to the political order of the English.

Nevertheless, there were repeated disappointments here and elsewhere. Why? Because the one thing needful, the cement also of states, was lacking; because men were averse and remained averse to the *Christian-historical* foundation; because history confirms what Scripture says: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision when kings and people, having broken their bands asunder, imagine a vain thing” [cf. Ps. 2:1-4].

Disillusionment is unavoidable so long as men do not *break* with the spirit of the Revolution. For the foundation of every liberty and of all authority lies in submission to the Highest Lawgiver. Liberalism is

not the spirit of liberty; it mistakes building on an unchangeable foundation for obstinate clinging to all that is *old* and for misguided repulsion of all that is *modern*. The precondition for liberty and progress is to be found precisely, in fact, in that which the liberal regards as a worn-out theory of servile submission.

APPENDIX B: "Atheism grows into idol worship." Continuation of note 50, from page 30, above.

As I explained in my opening address to the Association for Christian Elementary Education: "There is a school of thought which supplants the Gospel with a Christianity of its own making—a figment, a phantasm—and which kneels before this philosophical idol while rejecting every truth that is revealed and not proven by reason or experience; which despises Christianity as superstitious folly; which makes Christianity a butt even less of mockery than of hatred — yes, of a complete and fanatical hatred, this hitherto ineradicable sect being now the most powerful, hence also the most adverse obstacle to the evolution of mankind. The so-called neutrality [of the public school] grows into the most pernicious partiality favouring unbelief and ends in proselytism for the religion of reason and nature." *Bijdragen der Vereeniging voor Christelijk-nationaal Schoolonderwijs*, II (1861), 32f.

The closing paragraph of Renan's essay on the critical lives of Jesus is very revealing: "Eternal beauty shall dwell forever in the sublime name of the Christ, as it does in all those whom mankind has chosen for reminding itself what humanity is and for finding inspiration in its own image. . . ." *Etudes d'histoire religieuse*, p. 215. "As it does in all those," he says. His Christ is not even *facile princeps* [easily the first] or *primus inter pares* [the first among equals]. Renan points, rather, to a common ideal that derives from all these personalities. *Voilà*, he concludes, the living God: "There you have the living God, the one to adore." *Ibid.*

This becomes the religion of humanity. "A negating and sardonic unbelief has been succeeded by an unbelief which believes, by a fervent atheism, by an enthusiastic materialism. In our day impiety itself has become a religion." Vinet, *Considérations présentées à Messieurs les Ministres démissionnaires*, p. 37. [Cf. also below, p. 000.]

Thus unbelief, too, comes to have its version of *divine right* and

its *state religion*. The public conscience becomes the highest law for each citizen, even above his own conscience; see my *Grundwetter-
 zierung*, pp. 116-121 [“In our day even the Revolution has its divine
 right. . . . One striking instance I came across in recent months is from
 Louis Blanc: ‘The liberals, scarcely victorious, hastened to convert their
 famous theory of atheism into law without minding that whatever is
 deducted in the state from the sovereignty of God is added to the
 sovereignty of the hangman. . . . One must not confound liberty of
 conscience with equality of religions: the conscience is a sanctuary
 which no human power has the right to violate; but it is a long way
 from this respect for individual and private worship to the abolition of
 all *state religion*. The state owes it to itself to direct the moral interests
 of society just as it directs its material interests: if it declares itself
 indifferent, it abdicates its responsibility.’ *Histoire de dix ans.
 1830-1840*, II, 282. . . . And even a Lamartine says today, ‘Let us
 fasten again to God, link by link, the summary declarations of our
 Constitution.’ And would you care to hear how Lamartine formulated
 the theory of divine right recently on the occasion of the promulgation
 of the Constitution? Here is a snippet from his priceless speech:
 ‘People! God alone is sovereign, for he alone is creator, he alone is
 infallible, just, good, perfect. God’s echo upon the human race is
 human reason. Human reason alone, therefore, emanating from God,
 inspired by God, God’s minister in us, is the legitimate sovereign of the
 nations The reign of God through the reason of all is called the
 republic Never since the days of the Gospel has human reason
 codified a sovereignty more rational, more universal and more legal.’
 And now the interpretation of the oracle: Since human reason holds
 sway, God rules; the People do not submit to the higher sovereignty of
 God, no, the sovereignty of God is revealed in, in fact resolves into, the
 sovereignty of the People; the promise ‘ye shall be as God’ is gloriously
 fulfilled in the apotheosis of the People. – Never, perhaps, has there
 been a more ludicrous exhibition of rationalist and pantheist nonsense.
 But I let that rest. I only want to point out that today the question is
 not: do you acknowledge the sovereignty of God? But rather: which
 God will you have? the god of the pantheists or the living God whom
 Christendom worships? . . . In the words of Stahl: ‘The cardinal
 question of the present time is . . . the battle between theism and
 pantheism, and parallel with it runs the battle of Christianity against
 the de-Christianization of the civilized world. For an abstract theism is
 impossible today: everywhere the great decision forces itself upon

men.' *Philosophie des Rechts*, II, vii. As someone so rightly observed recently in the Second Chamber: 'While we are busy here flailing away at the phantom fear of restoring an erstwhile dominant church, two armies are rallying, that of positive Christianity under the banner of the Cross, and that of positive Unbelief under the banner of Humanity.' And what Stahl, writing in the *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, 1847, p. 639, says of his own country will soon be true of more countries: 'There are at present only two *political* parties in Germany, the Christians and the non-Christians.' – The continued unfolding of the Revolution ideas will cause any halfway or arbitrary application to become untenable: it will disclose to the full the anti-Christian nature of the theory and thus leave no choice in the long run save total surrender to, or total rebellion against, Him who is set for the fall or rising again of many"].

"The apotheosis of humanity is the spiritual culmination of democracy; it is the very life's breath of the first French revolution. . . . A *religion* is established here, the cult of humanity, and whoever refuses to worship shall be punished with annihilation." Stahl, *Die gegenwärtigen Parteien*, p. 187.

LECTURE IX

UNBELIEF
(continued)

.....

WE HAVE SEEN HOW A REVIVAL OF the faith during the Reformation eventually expired in dead orthodoxy or hypocrisy and moral decline, and how room was thus made for unbelief to spread in, especially among the classes whose mental habits predominantly influence the progress of ideas. It is this unbelief which brought about the Revolution. The truth of my thesis can be demonstrated from history; but I have thought it not superfluous to follow another line of argument first. I have wanted to show you, from its unique character and intrinsic nature, what the inevitable operation of systematic unbelief must be. For this purpose I had first to investigate how the error develops into a system, both in religion and in politics. That is, I had to discover the conclusions to which men must be led once they accept the false principle. In the previous lecture I tried to do this with respect to religion. I set myself the task of showing you how the supremacy of Reason culminates in atheism, how there can be no point of rest short of the bottom of the abyss. The same task now remains with respect to political theory. Thus I want to devote this evening hour to developing the argument that revolutionary liberty,

or the sovereignty of the human will, dissipates itself in the depths of radicalism.¹

The analogy noted earlier² between the religious question and the political one is easy to see. The transition is natural and unaffected. Haller observes:

From the chimerical idea of making every man's reason independent of all authority, or of destroying all faith completely, to the no less ridiculous project of emancipating men from every temporal ruler . . . there is but one easy and inevitable step. The natural association of ideas had necessarily to lead to this conclusion. This explains, too, why the campaign against altar and throne, against Church and State, against priests and kings, advanced always in step, conducted simultaneously by the same men and sustained by the same principles.³

Freedom of thought, but also of conduct. Supremacy of the intellect, but also of the will. Reason uncorrupted, but also the heart. Man, of himself, good; but then—whence evil? Man, of himself, disposed to good works and deeds of love; but then—whence a society disturbed and consumed by a thousand swords of human passions?

Philosophy has its answer prepared. The origin of evil lies in the forms, in the institutions. Through incorrect institutions the pristine rectitude of human

¹ [In an excursus that he never published, Groen proceeded at this point to answer an objection that had been raised at the previous gathering: that he was applying what may have been true of France too broadly to the rest of Europe. This excursus was preserved in manuscript and is included here, in translation, in Appendix A; see below, page 76.]

² [See above, p. 16.]

³ Haller, *Restauration*, I, 130f.

nature was distorted and its penchants and passions began to operate in a direction contrary to its natural disposition.⁴ The conclusion, accordingly, is obvious: the means by which the state should restore and perfect itself must lie simply in altering the institutions, in overthrowing all impediments to liberty, in following man's natural inclinations and passions.

I would have you notice one point in particular. Just as all truth rests upon the truth that is from God, so the common foundation of all rights and duties lies in the sovereignty of God. When that Sovereignty is lost, when God is denied or (what amounts to the same thing) banished to heaven because His kingdom is not of this world,⁵ what becomes then of the fountain of authority, of law, of every sacred and dutiful relation in state, society and family? what sanction remains for the distinctions of rank and station in life? what reason can there be that I obey and another commands? that the one is needy, the

⁴ † "If evil is just an accident, the fruit of external causes, and not an internal fact inherent in the nature of man, then man has the power to avoid it or to repair it. . . . The truth about the nature of man is found in the Christian religion; it is in man himself that evil resides: he is inclined to evil. I do not wish to engage in theology here, but I unhesitatingly avail myself of its terms, which are most precise and clear; *the doctrine of original sin* is the religious description of a natural fact: the innate penchant of man towards disobedience and licence." Guizot, *Nos Mémoires*, pp. 6f, 8.

⁵ † "The kingdom of God is not *of* or *out of* this world: i.e., it does not arise out of sinful, depraved humanity, it does not proceed from a human nature left to its own resources." Annotation to John 18:36 ["My kingdom is not of this world"] by Otto von Gerlach, ed., *Das Neue Testament nach Dr Martin Luthers Uebersetzung*, I, 499.

other rich? All this is custom, routine, abuse, injustice, oppression. There can be, despite all social diversities, no real differences among men. Eliminate God, and it can no longer be denied that all men are, in the revolutionary sense of the words, free and equal. State and society disintegrate, for there is a principle of dissolution at work that does not cease to operate until all further division is frustrated by that indivisible unit, that isolated human being, the *individual*—a term of the Revolution's naively expressive of its all-destructive character.⁶ What do you suppose former generations would have thought of a political nomenclature in which man, the creature of God's image, would by preference be referred to as an individual?⁷ Yet the designation is correct. The state is dissolved into a multitude of indivisible particles, of atoms, so that the state may be formed—like the world according to the familiar system of Epicurus—"from the chance concurrence of atoms."

From the unbelieving point of view this liquidation of authority means the removal of an abuse that

⁶ [The first edition reads: "a term which could only have been born under the influence of the Revolution and which expresses naively and powerfully its all-destructive character."]

⁷ † "Our fathers did not yet know the word *individualism*, which we have coined for our particular requirements, because in their time there was in fact no individual who did not belong to some group and who could therefore regard himself as an isolated unit." Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime*, p. 148f. — "*Individualism*, which destroys the very idea of obedience and duty, . . . is the basis of the new rationalist politics and the inevitable conclusion of every doctrine which excludes Christianity." Lamennais, *Des Progrès de la Révolution*, p. 26.

is degrading to humanity. And from that point of view the judgment is correct, since unbelief knows only *human* authority. It is in the denial of the *divine* right of authority that we find the source, not only of liberalism, but of the perfervour which it generates. The liberal theory is not unconnected to the nobility of our nature. A man does indeed demean himself if he submits to a mere fellow creature: it really is beneath a man's dignity to bow his neck before a peer who commands in his own name and not as a fellow servant of God. This truth, stated powerfully by Lamennais, affords us a searching look into the heart of revolutionary turbulences:

An *angel* is by nature higher than man; yet man, strictly speaking, owes nothing to an angel. If an angel were to assume a sensible form and come down to earth, would there be any reason to obey him? I can see no right on the one side, no duty on the other. Every created being enjoys by nature an independence from every other created being; and if the most sublime of celestial spirits were to come, of his own accord and with no other title than his own will, to dictate laws to man and to subject him to his rule, I should see in him only a tyrant and in his subjects only slaves. But now, what if a *man* arrogates to himself dominion over another man, who is his equal in rights, and in reason, insight and virtue often his superior? Is there any pretension more iniquitous and insolent or any servitude more ignominious? Indeed, I do not hesitate to say with Rousseau: 'It takes a long alteration of sentiments and ideas before a man is ready to tolerate his equal as his master.'⁸

⁸ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. xi [the citation of

But what to do? State and society exist, do they not? And unless we want to live again like barbarians they had better exist: authority and law and obligation and inequality are not to be dispensed with. The historical state, however, is dissolved. Very well then, how shall the revolutionary state be formed?

The idea of forming and constituting a state, of creating a state at will, is absurd in itself. As Lamennais has put it:

One of the most dangerous follies of our age is the

Rousseau is from *Du Contrat social*, IV, viii]. – † It is for this reason that I wrote in *Aan de Kiezers XIII*, p. 8, that the equality of all, and with it the companion notion of the collective sovereignty of the people, is “the life principle, the root, the first truth or first falsehood, in any case the first doctrine, of the Revolution’s catechism.” This doctrine forms “the core of the whole liberal dogmatics; it is the doctrine which contains the whole theory.” *Aan de Kiezers XIV*, p. 2. – As to the question whether popular sovereignty “has seen its best days,” see my *Verscheidenheden*, pp. 83-90 [“ . . . I should be pleased to be convinced of the correctness of this proposition, but there seems to be room for doubt. The radicals have for the time being been subdued by the reactionaries; but tormented by renewed disappointment, the vanquished ones impatiently and vengefully await better days for their beloved doctrine, dearer than ever now that it is snubbed by all. That popular sovereignty had served its purpose was believed and declared in 1795, in 1800, in fact whenever a counter-revolution had triumphed over a revolutionary movement. Louis Napoleon will join you today in declaiming that the series of revolutions has been brought to an end. In 1847 Louis Philippe said the same thing. And before him, Louis XVIII, and earlier even Napoleon himself, had asserted the same. In 1827, and no less in 1847, Holland felt reassured in the face of popular sovereignty: it was an idea which men believed had worn itself out. – Yet there was probably never a time in which such reassurance was as misleading as it is in our own”].

delusion that a state can be constituted, or a society formed, from one day to the next, in the same way that a factory is erected. Societies are not made: they are the work of nature and time acting in concert. That is the very reason why it is so difficult for a society to restore itself once men have destroyed it, the same action that has destroyed also opposing the repairing action of time and nature. Men want to create everything in an instant, to fashion everything from the imagination, to form society at a single casting so to speak, after an ideal model, just as one creates a bronze statue. Everywhere they substitute the arbitrary contrivances of the mind for the essential relations, for the simple and fruitful laws that are established of themselves, when not impeded, as the indispensable conditions of existence. When they began the overthrow, infatuated with the chimerical theories, they doubted of nothing because they knew nothing; afterwards they think they know all because they have done much and suffered much and because, having dissected whole peoples alive to search their entrails for the mysteries of the social organism, they believe that science must at last be complete and society perfectly understood. Given this confidence, nothing gives pause, nothing embarrasses. They constitute, and then they constitute some more. They write on a piece of paper that they are a monarchy, or a republic, in anticipation of being something in reality, of being a people, a nation.⁹

An excellent exposé of the absurdity of such innovation! Yet this absurdity is the only wisdom available to the Revolution as its principle unfolds. With law and history thrust aside, how can there be any other rule for the builders save self-conceit and caprice?

⁹ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence*, ch. x.

Let us see, then, how the fresh formation of the state is conceived in revolutionary theory: let us examine the formula that is said not to degrade man.

How shall the state be formed? How shall the union of free and equal persons be achieved? Through mutual consent alone. For if the revolutionary conception of freedom and equality is to be at the foundation of the edifice, then authority and law can only be *conventional* and the state can have no other origin, barring force, than a *social contract*. Here we have again, therefore, the error which we found epitomized the perversion of constitutional law.¹⁰ Here we see the unbelieving political theory sanctioning—consistently with its atheistical premise and in the most profligate manner imaginable—the erroneous notion that *association* is the basis of the state.

To save time, I leave it to you to unroll all the implications of this doctrine. Yet I do want to offer you a sampling of the rich supply. I should like to read to you, in more or less systematic fashion, a few passages from Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Rousseau's writings have had an irresistible influence, even more I think because of the logic of their content than because of the charm of their presentation;¹¹ and this

¹⁰ See above, pp. 000-000.

¹¹ † “Liberalism's author *par excellence* is Rousseau. He carries the principle of the older natural law through consistently to the point where it yields the complete doctrine of revolution and wants nothing more save execution. He is therefore antecedent to the revolution in the same way as the physicist's explanation is antecedent to the experiment. He proved a poor physicist, however, for the experiment failed.” Stahl, *Philosophie des Rechts*, I, 290. — “He brought the system of the

particular work is especially instructive because it presents in a nutshell, with the violence of a logic that will not be stayed, the marrow of the entire political part of the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Unless I deceive myself, you will recognize the most dangerous errors in citation after citation; but you will perceive at the same time that, granted the point of departure, these errors possess all the marks of truth: the author's arrogant tone derives less from boasting and presumption than from a justifiable awareness of the irrefutability of his position.

What, according to Rousseau, is the foundation of society? Convention. "The social order, since it arises not from nature, must be founded upon conventions." (I, i.¹²)

Revolution to completion." *Ibid.*, p. 295. Cf. my *Handboek*, § 610 ["The pioneer of the revolution was above all J. J. Rousseau. As Luther personified the Reformation, so did Rousseau the Revolution. His influence was all the greater because he stood up to the atheists and the materialists; he was the most dangerous of the sophists because he was a sophist in good faith. . . . His *Social Contract* is the gospel of popular sovereignty"]; see also my *Grondwetherziening*, pp. 518ff ["Following in the footsteps of Grotius, Sidney, Locke and Montesquieu, all of whom went in the same direction, Rousseau went one step further; but it was a step by which the outer limit of the revolutionary development was reached. . . . An imaginary freedom and equality prior to the formation of society had indeed been taught by many theorists before Rousseau arrived on the scene. But this most captivating of the revolutionary sophists emphasized the inalienability of these primordial rights even in civil society"]. — Renan writes: "Rousseau gave the French revolution its *definitive stamp*, that is to say, its tendency toward abstract organization without respect either to anterior rights or to liberty." In *Revue des deux mondes* 29 (1859), XXII, 207n.

¹² Rousseau, *Du Contrat social*, Bk. I, ch. i.

Of what nature, then, is government? It is republican. "All legitimate government is republican." (II, vi.) You see how a single flourish of the pen expunges, yet with a logic that cannot be denied, the legitimacy of all the European kingdoms as I have sketched them earlier in their historic origin and essence.¹³

A republic therefore, always and everywhere. But of what kind? A democratic one: popular government, in the sense of universal liberty and equality. For, what is law? It is the will of the people. "The People, being subject to the laws, should be the authors of them." (II, vi.)¹⁴

Is this state authority, this popular will, restricted? In no wise.

It is contrary to the nature of the body politic that the Sovereign should impose upon himself a law which he cannot infringe. For since he cannot regard himself as someone else, he is in the position of an individual entering into a contract with himself. Whence it follows that there neither is, nor can be, any fundamental law that is binding upon the body of the People, not even the Social Contract itself. (I, vii.) The general will is always just. (II, iii.)

What part of his rights has the citizen retained by the social contract? Not any. The essence of that

¹³ [See Lecture IV.]

¹⁴ † Rousseau is not talking about a republic or a democracy as a form of government; he is talking about "democracy" as the corollary of popular sovereignty. See Stahl, *Die gegenwärtige Parteien*, chaps. v, xv. [This note is continued in Appendix B, page 79, below.]

contract lies in the complete surrender of one's rights. "The clauses of the Social Contract, when rightly understood, can be reduced to one: namely, each associate's absolute assignment to the community of himself and all his rights." (I, vi.)

What is the relationship between the citizen and the state? Utter subordination and passivity. "As nature gives to every man absolute command over all his members, so the Social Compact gives to the body politic absolute command over all its members: and it is this power which, when directed by the general will, bears the name of Sovereignty." (II, iv.)

When can the state require the life of a citizen? Whenever the state adjudges his death useful to the state.

The Citizen is no longer a judge of the peril to which the law may expose him. So if the Prince, the Sovereign, should say to him, "It is expedient for the State that you should die," then die he must, since it is on this condition alone that he will have lived till then in safety, and since his life will have been no longer merely the gift of nature but a grant, and a conditional one, from the State. (II, v.)

A more complete absolutism is scarcely conceivable. The citizen's very liberty is serfdom, no! it is the surrender of body and soul alike, to the state. – But is there no point at which Rousseau can be convinced of error? Once he has vowed to found the state upon convention, no. If his conclusions are terrifying, they are nonetheless consistent: a lesser compulsion or a better sort of liberty would destroy the whole system.

Here we encounter again the monstrous system of Hobbes—the same sovereign omnipotence, with but one difference: where Hobbes argues that power passes to the government, Rousseau insists that the people retain it. As Haller notes: “The only real difference between Hobbes and Rousseau is that after the conclusion of the social compact Hobbes has the originally sovereign people assign their power to a prince or a senate, whereas Rousseau claims that the people maintain complete and full possession of it.”¹⁵

But let us go on. What becomes of the civil magistrate? No office of government may be more than a temporary mandate, subject to cancellation or modification at the people’s pleasure. The following definition of government issues directly from the principle of conventional association:

What is government? It is an intermediary body set up to facilitate communication between subjects and Sovereign, and charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of liberty, both civil and political.

The members of such a body are called Magistrates or Kings, that is to say, Governors; and the body taken collectively is named the Prince. Those who contend that the act by which a People submits to rulers is not a contract are therefore quite right. That act is nothing but a commission, an employment, in which the rulers as mere officers of the Sovereign do but exercise in the Sovereign’s name the powers entrusted to them—powers which may be limited, modified, or resumed at the Sovereign’s pleasure. The alienation of such a right, after all, is incompatible with the nature of the body social, and

¹⁵ Haller, *Restoration*, I, 135.

contrary to the very object for which the association is formed. (III, i.)

Government is a proxy. It has no life of its own:

The State exists in and by itself, but government owes its existence entirely to the Sovereign. Thus the prevailing will of the Prince is, or should be, nothing other than the general will, or the Law. Such power as the Prince has is but the power of the community concentrated in his hands. The moment he initiates some absolute action independently, the bond of union which holds the State together is loosened. (III, i.)

Consequently, whenever the People assemble, the government recedes into the background:

The moment the People are convened as a Sovereign body, all the jurisdiction of government ceases, the Executive Power is suspended, and the person of the humblest citizen is as sacred and inviolable as that of the highest Magistrate: where those represented are present in person, representatives are no longer required. (III, xiv.)

What becomes of the various forms of government? The question loses importance since any real distinction between democracy, aristocracy or monarchy no longer exists. While these forms vary, the same popular sovereignty holds sway, recognizing no independent authority above or alongside or beneath itself:

The public person which is formed by the union of all persons was in older times called the City but nowadays takes the name Republic or Body Politic. Its members call it a State when it is passive, a Sovereign when it is active, and a Power when it is compared to other, similar bodies. As for the con-

stituent associates, collectively they are known as the People; while individually they are known as Citizens insofar as they share in the sovereign power, and as Subjects insofar as they owe obedience to the laws of the State. (I, vi.)

The Sovereign may entrust the custody of government to the whole People, or to the greater number of them . . . This form of government is designated Democracy. Or it may confine the government to a small number . . . This form of government is called Aristocracy. Finally, it may concentrate the whole of government in the hands of a single Magistrate, from whom all the other magistrates will hold power. This third form is called Monarchy, or royal government.¹⁶ . . . From the combining of these three types a host of mixed forms may result . . . (III, iii.)

And what sort of representative system can there be on these principles? The expedient of a legislative body of popular deputies is required for large states, of course; but actual representation is an absurdity, another form of slavery:

Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. Its essence is the general will, and a

¹⁶ † Every state is "a republic with one or several heads." Lamartine, *Histoire des Girondins*, I, 15. — On this basis monarchy is popular sovereignty under a single head; cf. my *Grundwetherziening*, pp. 21, 109. — "Liberalism's rationalistic doctrine of the state lacks the concept of king." Stahl, *Philosophie des Rechts*, III, 260. Cf. also my *Verscheidenheden*, pp. 188-192 ["Lamartine will have nothing of divine right. Nothing of royal supremacy. Nothing of a sovereign power of kings. . . . He will have much, on the other hand, of popular sovereignty. Much of a monarchical form of government. Much of a monarch as indivisible executive power. Much of a master-of-ceremonies king, of an hour-hand king who tells us what time it is on the clock of the supreme will of the people"].

will cannot be represented: a will is itself, or it is another will; there is no intermediary possibility. The People's deputies are therefore not, nor can they be, representatives; they can only be commissioners. They can make no binding decisions. Any law not ratified directly by the People is null and void, is in fact no law. The English people may think themselves free, but in this belief they are gravely mistaken. They are free only when electing members of Parliament. The elections over, they are slaves, they are nothing. (III, xv.)

Are you astonished again, as you review these doctrines, at the odd sort of liberty that shoots up from this revolutionary soil, where in any difference of opinion the minority is subjected to the incontestible and loathsome tyranny of the majority? But nonsense. Rousseau will show you that you have the greater liberty as you are pinched the more tightly in your chains. Unanimity was of course necessary, he says—but only once. And once upon a time it must indeed have obtained, for every citizen is assumed to have consented to the social contract. Now behold the consequences of this assumption—how beautifully the argument runs, how simple it really is, how perfect the respect for every person's liberty:

There is only one law which by its very nature demands unanimous consent, and that is the social pact. For of all acts, civil association is the most voluntary. Every man, after all, being born free, is his own master, and no one, under any pretext whatsoever, can bring him into subjection without his prior consent. . . .

In all matters beyond this original contract, the voice of the greater number is binding on all. This is a consequence of

the contract itself. But, it may be asked, how can a man be free and at the same time be forced to conform to wills that are not his own? . . .

. . . The constant will of all the members of the state is the General Will; it is by virtue of this that the members are citizens and that they are free. When a law is proposed in the assembly of the People, what they are asked is not whether they approve or reject the proposal in question, but whether or not it is in conformity with the general will, which is *their* will. . . . Therefore when a view which is at odds with my own carries, it proves to me only that I have been mistaken, and that what I took to be the general will was not such at all. Had my private opinion prevailed I should have done something different from what I really wished, and in that case I should not have been free. (IV, ii.)

Are you recalcitrant, and do they coerce you? – it is only (oh, deny not this act of love!) that through submission to the General Will you might attain to a fuller enjoyment of your freedom:

In order that the Social Compact may not be an empty formula it tacitly includes the one engagement which alone can give force to the whole, namely: that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body. This is no more than to say that he will be forced to be free. . . . (I, vii.)

Freedom is submission to the Law. We agree, if the law rests upon recognition of the highest Law-giver and upon submission to His commandments.¹⁷

¹⁷ [The second edition adds: “taken in context, moreover, with national rights and historical development”; to which the footnote is appended: “It is then right to maintain: *Nolumus Angliae leges mutari*”]

But we disagree if by law is meant the will, the approval, the good pleasure of the majority: we should, even if we had rejected the Bible, be put to shame by pagan wisdom.¹⁸ If freedom means unconditional obedience to the good pleasure of men, then freedom is a fiction. Thus it is not without grounds that Benjamin Constant writes, "Liberty can be lost in spite of the principle of popular sovereignty, or even because of it."¹⁹ As he indicates: "Montesquieu,

(We will not have the laws of England altered); this is the standpoint of the historical law school in opposition to any arbitrariness or omniscience of law, in opposition to revolutionary codification. Cf. my *Adviezen*, I, 372, 383, 413." – The legal maxim Groen cites in this footnote dates from the parliament of Merton of 1236, where the barons provided that the indigenous common law should have precedence over imported Roman or canon law.]

¹⁸ In Cicero, when he speaks of laws, we read statements like these: "But the most foolish notion of all is the belief that everything is 'just' which is decreed in the institutions and laws of nations, or even in the laws (assuming they be such) of tyrants. If the Thirty Tyrants had wanted to impose laws on Athens, or if the Athenians had all delighted in tyrannical laws, would that be any reason to consider such laws just? . . . If justice were founded on the will of the people or the edicts of princes or the sentences of judges, it would be just to rob and commit adultery and forge wills whenever such deeds were approved by ballot or plebiscite. But if the vote of fools is of such great power that it can turn nature itself upside down, then why do they not ordain that what is bad and baneful shall be considered good and salutary? Or again, if a law can make justice out of injustice, why can it not also make good out of evil? . . . From this it can be readily understood that those who have drawn up pernicious and unjust statutes for the peoples, since they have acted contrary to what they promised and professed, have done anything but enacted *laws*: for it is clear that the very word law [*lex*] contains the idea of choosing [*legere*] what is right and just." *De Legibus*, I, xv, xvi; II, v.

¹⁹ Constant, *Cours de politique constitutionnelle*, I, 162.

in his definition of liberty, completely ignored the limits to social authority. Liberty, says Montesquieu, is the right to do everything the laws permit. Undoubtedly so. There would be no liberty whatever if citizens were not allowed to do everything the laws do not forbid. But the laws could forbid so many things that there would be no liberty left.”²⁰

Freedom is submission to the State. Here we have yet another definition of liberty, after the motto *servire statui libertas*, “to serve the State is liberty.” But this definition differs in wording only, not in substance. And neither theory nor experience has ever taught that *true* liberty is to be found here, as it certainly can be found with the motto *servire Deo vera libertas*, “to serve God is true liberty.”²¹

Benjamin Constant would have done better still if he had indicated how the loss of freedom can

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²¹ † Cf. my *Narede van vijftjarigen strijd*, p. 13 [“Not everything falls within the province of the law. The good pleasure of the legislator is limited by the sacredness of right. There is room, on the basis of a higher principle, for legitimate protest against the omnipotence of the law. — How often have I not been suspected in the Second Chamber of teaching *disturbance of the peace* because I have defended maxims like these, because I have defended passive resistance for conscience’ sake, because I have defended the martyrs’ slogan, “I *cannot* do otherwise because I *may* not do otherwise, so help me God!” And yet here, too, the contrast between the Christian-historical and the Revolutionary views of the state emerges. *We* obey, and we also refuse to obey, for the sake of one and the same principle: unconditional submission to the highest Lawgiver and King; whereas unconditional submission to laws which one *has made oneself* (albeit through one’s representatives) is linked inseparably to the revolutionary view of the state”].

possibly be avoided in a state in which everything is made to rest upon social conventions. For it is of little profit to know how pernicious all these doctrines are if one never comes to see that they are manifestations of a coherent system, the ramifications of a single root. Look at the effect of unbelief on conjugal and family life. These ties, too, must be loosened when Divine sovereignty is not acknowledged; and naturally so, since the most tender relationship is also the most sacred. If *Honour thy father and thy mother* no longer holds, what else can there be save a passing bond based on utter helplessness and near animal-like attachment? Whatever goes beyond that can be no more than a matter of convention. So Rousseau says:

Children remain attached to their father only as long as they need his protection. As soon as that need ceases the bond of nature is dissolved. The children, exempt from the obedience they owed their father, and the father, from the care he owed his children, return equally to a state of independence. If they continue to remain together they do so no longer by nature but by choice of will, and the family itself is continued by reason of convention only. (I, ii.)

Where the will of all gives birth to state omnipotence, where the security and well-being of the state is the highest law, and where the will of woman too is part of the general will, why should it not be argued in connection with education that “children belong to the republic before they belong to their parents”²² —

²² [Danton, speaking in the National Convention, Dec. 12, 1793,

a maxim which, translated into plain language, means that no paternal right or authority whatever is acknowledged; that the family is a fiction, or at least an abuse in need of reform; that the sole object of marriage is to supply the State with "young" of the human species, which the State may arrange to have educated as it wishes and may dispose of as it sees fit.²³

Haller mentions a university professor in Würzburg who wanted, even as late as 1804, to "admit women and girls as active citizens to the body politic."²⁴ This idea is not so far-fetched as it may seem. For where people are wilfully ignorant of the fact that the Lord God made woman to be a help meet for man so that every man might love his wife as himself and the wife reverence the husband,²⁵ there one's wife is no longer one's companion along life's pathway and the way of life. There she becomes one's co-ruler, or else one's slave. There one is condemned, having rejected the wisdom and tender love of God, to lapse into the foolishness of the philosopher or the coarseness of the barbarian.

There is a final point of consequence: that of religion. What will be the policy of the revolutionary state with respect to religion? To tolerate all religions while having no religion itself. With one proviso, of course—that the state shall command reverence for

during the debate on whether or not to make attendance of the public primary schools compulsory.]

²³ Lamennais, *Des Progrès de la Révolution*, p. 147.

²⁴ Haller, *Restauration*, I, 84 [where reference is made to Wilhelm Joseph Behr, *Système du Droit politique universel* (1804)].

²⁵ [Cf. Gen. 2:18, Eph. 5:33.]

its own precepts for politics and morality, and ban any religion that refuses to bow before the idol. On religious grounds? Not at all, oh no! But on political grounds rather: on the grounds that doctrines adjudged unsuitable by the state are anti-social and immoral. This we can read virtually word for word in Rousseau:

The subject is in no sense obliged to render an account of his opinions to the Sovereign save insofar as they affect the community. Now it is of considerable importance to the State that each citizen profess a religion which will dispose him to delight in his duties; but the dogmas of such a religion are of no concern to the State or its members save insofar as they bear upon the morality of the citizen who professes it, and hence upon the duties he owes to others. . . .

There is therefore a purely civic religion whose articles of faith should be determined by the Sovereign, not so much as religious dogmas, but as the sentiments of sociability without which a man can be neither a good citizen nor a faithful subject. Although it has no power to compel anyone to believe them, the Sovereign can banish anyone from the State who does not—banish him not as an impious person, but as an unsociable one, as one who is incapable either of sincerely loving the laws and justice or of sacrificing, should the need arise, his life to his duty. If a man who has publicly subscribed to these articles of faith proceeds to conduct himself as though he did not believe them, he merits the death penalty. (IV, viii.)

No positive religion whatsoever shall be tolerated in opposition to the requirements of revolutionary sociability. We have already seen²⁶ what Rousseau

²⁶ Above, p. 27.

thinks of “revelations”—how according to him they have caused so much misery and visited so many atrocities upon mankind, how they are little more than symptoms of a disease that should be eradicated. Here is the same opinion articulated by a man who strove to put it into practice:

Our committee felt that the only dogmas worthy of maintenance in a regenerated society would be the beliefs in the existence of a Supreme Being and in the immortality of the soul. For it is important, we argued, that citizens should acknowledge an infallible judge of their secret thoughts and actions, which no laws can reach, and that they should be convinced that their devotion to humanity and country must inevitably bring them eternal happiness. As to worship, it was considered desirable that it should be limited to revering the social compact, defending equality, and observing certain public festivals. All so-called revelations were to be relegated by the laws to the category of maladies whose germs must be gradually extirpated. In the meantime every man would be free to indulge his peculiar beliefs, provided public order, universal brotherhood and the authority of the laws remained undisturbed.²⁷

²⁷ Buonarrotti, *Conspiration de Babeuf*, I, 255. — † In the same vein one of the apostles of the present-day gospel of unbelief in Germany, Professor Gervinus [1805-71]. What he proposed, in 1846, was a national church whose latitudinarian policy would raise it, at the expense of doctrine, above “sectarian differences” (in much the same manner as was contemplated in our country in 1865 — see my *Studiën ter schoolwetherziening*, Bijlage). And what after that? Very simple, says Gervinus: “The state need do no more than exclude opinionated extremists from the church community . . . and prohibit all private religious practices in fellowships and sects; whereas it should include, i.e., take under the shield of its sanction, anyone who is satisfied to

So if we should now take the system as a whole in its full import for religion and politics and recall that its success is expected to usher in an endless future of bliss for mankind, and then set it opposite the inexorable Word of Revelation (of which the Revolution might well say, as Demosthenes did of Phocion, "This is the axe that cuts down all my discourses"),—should we then have any doubt that with respect to this terrain, too, the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the devil²⁸ is inevitable? Is tolerance toward the living Gospel conceivable in a genuinely revolutionary state? Will the Revolution permit the ark of God to stand in all its shattering power before Dagon?²⁹ "His impiety would destroy the God he has abandoned"³⁰—here is a verse that applies profoundly to the entire revolutionary movement. For it is only by forsaking and resisting God, under the inspiration of the Father of Lies—it is only by seeking to assume God's likeness and place, by desiring to see God destroyed, if that were possible—that those who have arrived on the revolutionary ground of systematic godlessness can remain consistent with their principle and true to themselves.

So much for the political catechism of Rousseau, a man who did not flinch before the iron rules of logic. Even where they censure him for carry-

subscribe to the vaguest possible confession of the new church." [G. G. Gervinus, *Die Mission der Deutsch-Katholiken*, 1845, p. 73; as quoted in] *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, 1846, p. 21.

²⁸ [Cf. Gen. 3:15.]

²⁹ [Cf. 1 Sam. 5:1-5.]

³⁰ [Racine, *Athalie*, I, i, 41f.]

ing the argument too far, it is impossible for his spiritual kinsmen to refute him.

No case against the Revolution is stronger than the one which demonstrates that the falsely so called *ultras* are right over against the self-styled *moderates*; that the ultras are not only produced, but even rendered irrefutable, by what the moderates teach; that there is no middle course; that a man must build upon rock, not sand, if he would not sink away into the revolutionary abyss. Our refutation of the false principles will have made much progress if people can be made to see that even the most horrifying policies have been but consequences of the accepted theories. Nothing can be more useful than to collect examples and evidences proving that these theories did not just occasion, but actually generated, the revolutionary folly and calamity. Permit me, then, to bring three such examples to your attention before I conclude this lecture: the relation of Montesquieu to Rousseau; the rise of the Illuminists; and one of the least noted yet most noteworthy episodes of the French revolution, the conspiracy of Babeuf.

Montesquieu has always been the idol and Rousseau the terror of the inconsistent party. But is their judgment fair? What did Rousseau do but continue what Montesquieu had begun, bringing unity and completeness to the system of a less bold predecessor?³¹ Both proceed from the same premises.

³¹ † Stahl describes the fundamental unity of the two in the

Montesquieu too proclaims, or at least implies, that all men are equal, that the will of the people is the highest law, that government should be guided by what the majority approve. And as regards the realization of these fundamental precepts, what does he demand? A state contrived by himself along the lines of an altogether inaccurate and anti-historical model of the English constitution: an artificially created state-machine in which he promises the complete separation yet harmonious co-operation of three powers, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. Rousseau's satire of this conception lacks neither wit nor justice:

Our political theorists, finding it impossible to divide the sovereignty as to its principle, divide it as to its object. They divide it into force and will; into legislative power and executive power; into rights of taxation, adjudication and war; into domestic administration and the regulation of foreign affairs. Sometimes they confound these parts and sometimes they separate them. They make of the Sovereign a fantastic creature, an assemblage of interlocking pieces. It is as though a man were to be constructed from several bodies, one having

following terms: "The liberal constitutional theory of Locke, Blackstone, Montesquieu, Delolme, Rousseau, Aretin, Rotteck, and others, is founded upon the principle of popular sovereignty, that is, upon Rousseau's contention that the supreme power belongs to the totality of individuals, and is merely *modified* (depending upon the political faction) by the constitutional principle, *Montesquieu's* postulate of a mechanical balance of the powers." *Philosophie des Rechts*, III, 331 [emphasis added]. Impartial and generous as he is, however, Stahl does not neglect to pay tribute to Montesquieu's merits as well; cf. *ibid.*, I, 330-349: "Machiavelli und Montesquieu."

only eyes, another arms, a third feet, but none with anything more. Japanese charlatans, it is reported, dismember a child before the eyes of an audience and then, flinging its limbs one after the other into the air, cause the child to come down again alive and whole. Such, or almost such, are the juggling tricks of our political authors. First they dismember the body social with a magic that would do credit to a country fair; and then they put its parts together again, no one knows how.³²

Rousseau is quite right when he goes on to say that this dividing results from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of (popular) sovereignty: "This error arises from not having formed accurate notions of the nature of sovereign power, and from mistaking for parts of that power what are simply emanations from it."³³ But even in a general sense Montesquieu's formula offers no guarantee whatsoever for preserving the rights of the sovereign people. His theory is a half measure. In fact, it is worse than that. His writings not only fail to bring the revolutionary seed to full development; they actually smother it, so to speak, by applying it incorrectly. His is a case of *desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne*, "a bad end of a good beginning."

Was Montesquieu's inconsistency the result of short-sightedness, however, or was it, as I sooner think, a case of circumspection? Is it not possible that in breaking the ice Montesquieu matched Rousseau in boldness; that his friends were right in calling him *vir magnum quantum licebat*, "a great man *insofar* as it

³² *Du Contrat social*, II, ii.

³³ *Ibid.*

was permitted him"; that temporary concealment of the intended goal was necessary in the interest of the new doctrine in order that it might gain acceptance among the timorous? However that may be, all I claim is that it is Rousseau, who under the motto *Vitam impendere vero*³⁴ put aside all fear and shame and who actually did nothing other than work out the full implications of the principles of Montesquieu—that it is Rousseau, over against the real or pretended halfness of Montesquieu (ascribe it to myopia or shrewd calculation as you wish), who was right.

My second example is derived from the Illuminists.³⁵ The proponents of this sect, after the manner of so many who dwell in darkness, called themselves the friends of light—any light, even the will-o'-the-wisp, was light to them—, friends of their own light, the exceptionally, nay exclusively enlightened ones. I need not sketch for you the rise of this sect in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, its ramifications and conspiracies and ultimate demise.³⁶ I wish merely to point out that in its

³⁴ ["One's life for the truth": Rousseau's personal device.]

³⁵ [Illuminists: a short-lived movement of republican freethought, founded in Bavaria on May-day 1776, and dedicated to the advancement of reason in society. Calling itself the Order of Perfectionists, it established relations with masonic lodges and had branches in most European countries. After being proscribed in Bavaria in 1784, it soon became extinct.]

³⁶ [The second edition inserts: "I do not wish to attach too much importance to it"; to which is appended a verdict by Tocqueville: "The secret societies were the symptoms of the disease and not the

origin and in its effects it is a native product, a typical crop of the revolutionary soil.

What was the principal thrust of their doctrine? Demolition. Indeed; and not in order to build up again, either. By demolishing the state they sought to return to the only condition in harmony with man's natural genius: absolute freedom and independence for every head of a family. An accurate picture is given by Haller:

What characterized them particularly, what formed the distinguishing feature of their system, was this: that with a consistency quite correct in itself they regarded the very act of forming a state as *artificial* and all alienation or delegation of individual liberty, whether in favour of a single or of several individuals or even of the majority, as just so much folly, the sole effect of which must be to produce a despotism without remedy, more oppressive than the first; and again it was this: that precisely because they regarded the existing states as arbitrary institutions they did not desire merely to reform them, to give them a new basis, or to organize them as republics, just as the common run of revolutionaries do, but rather to abolish them altogether, to destroy them, and to restore the so-called state of nature—a condition which they regarded as preferable, despite some dangers and partial drawbacks, to the artificial servitude born of the Social Contract, and which they did not consider devoid of some form of social organization in any case, since to their mind as to almost everyone else's every father of a family in the state of nature must have been a priest and an independent sovereign.³⁷

disease itself, its effects and not its causes." *Correspondance*, II, 187; cf. Lecture XI, footnote 36.]

³⁷ Haller, *Restauration*, I, 163.

This doctrine, so apparently mad in tenor and atrocious in effect, will seem less absurd and reprehensible if viewed in relation to what had preceded it. It was a reaction to the grotesque nonsense of Hobbes and Rousseau. We have seen what sort of state the Social Contract produces. Is it strange that some freedom-minded people should have preferred to break up society altogether rather than live in such a prison, or that they should have looked to some "state of nature" as an avenue of escape from such despotism?

The final revolutionary phenomenon to which I referred dates from 1796. The conspiracy of Babeuf³⁸ was the abortive endeavour of a pack of turbulent spirits whose mad pursuits, abruptly checked, had no influence on the course of events. Consequently they have been all but forgotten. The apologia³⁹ published by one of them in 1828 also made little, or at least no

³⁸ † "We must not follow the policy once advocated by Babeuf, that grandfather of all modern socialists." Tocqueville [in a speech before the Constituent Assembly, September 12, 1848], *Oeuvres complètes*, IX, 546 (emphasis added). — "Babeuf's followers, the 'egalitarian workmen,' are the true communists of modern times. They even went beyond his teachings in that they demanded community of wives, hence the abolition of marriage and the family." Stahl, *Die gegenwärtige Parteien*, p. 214. [The journalist François Noël Babeuf (1760-97) and his fellow conspirators planned a coup d'état to turn France into a radical socialist republic free of private property. Note by H. Smitskamp.]

³⁹ Philippe Buonarrotti (1761-1837), *Conspiration pour l'égalité dite de Babeuf, suivi du procès auquel elle donna lieu, et des pièces justificatives*, 2 vols., Brussels, 1828.

lasting, impression. And yet this work is exceedingly helpful, it seems to me, in illustrating the character of the Revolution. In it one can witness an old grey-beard, on the brink of the grave thirty-two years after the event, stepping forward with youthful enthusiasm and unabated conviction to defend and eulogize designs that were once frustrated to the detriment, he thinks, of all mankind; and what is more, one must admit that, for all their horror, the old man succeeds in vindicating his doctrines before the tribunal of revolutionary logic.

The abolition of property was their slogan. These were people who believed—and they would joyfully have laid down their lives for the cause—that unless this root of bitterness were destroyed the tree of liberty would not blossom: “Babeuf . . . did not hesitate to identify *private property* as the principal source of all the ills that burden society.” They were agreed “that the perennial cause of the enslavement of nations lies entirely in inequality and that, so long as inequality remains, the exercise of political rights will be little more than illusory for a host of men whom our civilization debases to a subhuman level.” They concluded that “the task, therefore, of a virtuous legislator is *to destroy this inequality*.”⁴⁰

But how? Some thought the goal could be accomplished by oppressing the rich. One in the company of conspirators

who had witnessed the National Convention provide for the

⁴⁰ Buonarrotti, *Conspiration*, I, 81, 85.

urgent needs of the country through indirect taxes, revolutionary assessments and levies on the rich, extolled this mode of —to use his own words—diverting the superabundance encumbering the overflowing channels of the rich towards those who lacked the barest necessities. Others in their turn advocated the redistribution of land, sumptuary laws, and progressive taxes.⁴¹

According to the real spokesmen and leaders of the group, however, such measures were inadequate. The only remedy lay in a *community of goods and labour*, in the proclamation and application of the great principle that the People or the State is the common owner: “The proprietorship of all the wealth of France resides essentially in the French people, which alone can determine and rearrange the pattern of its distribution.”⁴² This principle was to have been a prominent feature of the new constitution:

In a new social order . . . it would be acknowledged implicitly that private property does not emanate from the law of nature but is merely an invention of civil law and may therefore be modified or abolished; next, it would be established as a principle that the proprietorship of all the wealth within the national territory is one and indivisible and belongs inalienably to the people, which alone has the right of dispensing the use and usufruct thereof.

. . . a citizen could never acquire what are called property rights to anything; he would have only the right of use or usufruct of those objects or goods placed at his disposal by an act of government.⁴³

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I, 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, 207, 217.

A "national community" was to have been set up, by a decree the third article of which reads: "The right of succession, with or without testament, is abolished; all wealth now possessed by private persons shall revert upon their decease to the national community."⁴⁴

It is easy to stigmatize this doctrine with the odious label *Lex Agraria*,⁴⁵ to look upon its adherents as despicable anarchists, and to see in their attempt only an avaricious revolt of the poor against the rich. But that is not the way to profit from the grave warnings suggested by this affair—warnings which are of vital interest and crucial importance to us today, considering the alarming growth of pauperism, the plain inadequacy of the measures being employed to combat it, and the ominous initiatives of Chartists⁴⁶ and Communists.⁴⁷ Here was no passing excitement, no frivolous preoccupation with mere

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 306.

⁴⁵ [Allusion to land reforms periodically introduced in republican Rome whereby public lands in the hands of the rich were recovered for distribution among the poor. The most famous sponsors of such measures were the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, tribunes respectively in 133 and 123 B.C. (Babeuf in fact adopted "Gracchus" as a nom de guerre.) Land reform measures were often a sop in the hands of politicians cultivating popular support; in Groen's parlance "*lex agraria*" is synonymous with political bribery.]

⁴⁶ [Chartism was a British working-class movement which grew out of disillusionment with the "sham" Reform Bill of 1832 and indignation with the humiliating provisions of the Poor Law of 1834. Its spokesmen advocated "social equality" and universal suffrage. By the time Groen made these remarks in January 1846, Chartists had

figments of the imagination. Here was well-reasoned and steadfast dedication to principles—principles which the opposition managed to dispute only by transparently denying their own principles for the sake of their own interests. For *if* authority and right are conventional, why indeed should there be an exception for the authority of the owner and for the right of ownership? On what would such an exception rest, given the absence of any higher sanction? *If* the people, concentrated in the state, are the almighty Sovereign over all parts of the state, why indeed should their sovereignty be curbed in the disposition of so-called property rights? That there can be no property except insofar as the State permits it, that to allow or deny ownership is the prerogative of the State alone, is of course a doctrine that had already been taught by Rousseau: “It is agreed that each man alienates through the Social Compact only such portion of his powers, property and liberty as is essential to the community; but it is also agreed that the Sovereign alone is judge of what is essential.”⁴⁸ Robespierre accordingly gave the following definition

deposited several unsuccessful petitions with Parliament, had been implicated in such civil disturbances as the Bull Ring Riots of 1839 and the Plug Riots of 1842, and had begun to propagate co-operative land holding.]

⁴⁷ [Groen refers to the pre-Marxian communism which was being propagated particularly in France between 1830 and 1848 and which, following Babeuf, demanded the abolition of private ownership, family and marriage. *Note by H. Smitskamp.*]

⁴⁸ *Du Contrat social*, II, iv.

of property: "Property is the right which every citizen has freely to enjoy and dispose of *that portion of fortune or wealth that is guaranteed to him by the law.*"⁴⁹ So the decision lies with "the law," that is, with the good pleasure of the majority. And if *that* is the law that must prevail in the state, is it indeed strange, is it not rather just, that advantage should be taken of it to secure the real and final triumph of the revolutionary principles? Is it not desirable, and in view of the galling discrepancy between plenty and poverty is it indeed not an urgent necessity, that the people as a whole should allot to each of its members a certain "allowance," fixed by the general will, which is always just? Is it possible to contrive a means more suitable than communism and the "organization of labour"⁵⁰ for ending economic inequality, which in so many ways stymies the promise and intent of political liberty and equality?⁵¹

I could easily multiply these examples of logical irreproachability. Judged by revolutionary standards even Diderot's barbaric yearning "to strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest," so far from be-

⁴⁹ Quoted in Buonarrotti, *Conspiration*, I, 27.

⁵⁰ [In his work *Organisation du travail* (Organization of Labour) the utopian socialist Louis Blanc (cf. above, p. 00) recommended that private enterprise be phased out in favour of production co-operatives to be set up with state aid. *Note by H. Smitskamp.*]

⁵¹ † "Socialism is inevitably the national economic system of democracy whenever the latter attains to mature self-awareness." Stahl, *Die gegenwärtige Parteien*, p. 212.

ing excessive, represents the purest love of humanity. By the same measure there is no extravagance but telling correctness, really, in the article with which Robespierre⁵² solemnly concludes his *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*: "Kings, aristocrats, tyrants of every description, are slaves in revolt against the sovereign of the earth, which is Humanity, and against the legislator of the universe, which is Nature."⁵³

But enough! I should not like to abuse your attention by belabouring the point. What I have tried to demonstrate is that the principle of unbelief—the sovereignty of reason and the sovereignty of the people—must end, while proclaiming Liberty, either in radicalism or in despotism: in the disintegration of society or in the tyranny of a state in which all things are levelled without any regard to true liberties and true rights.⁵⁴ Such is the *nec plus ultra*, the twin

⁵² Quoted in Buonarrotti, *Conspiration*, 1, 32.

⁵³ † This is popular sovereignty derived from a *primordial human right*: "... this conception of law is the pivotal error of the Revolution, for upon it rests its basic premise: that the fountain and standard of law is the will of man and not the world order of God." Stahl, *Die gegenwärtige Parteien*, p. 192. It amounts to a "fundamental emancipation from God and his Revelation." *Ibid.*, p. 207. — The development of the Revolution principle leads to a state religion imposed as a civic duty; cf. above, p. 60. — Principle against principle. For or against the Son of God. "Nothing is more anti-Christian than the ideas, the language, the influence of today's social reformers. If communism and socialism prevail, the Christian religion will perish. If Christianity proves more powerful, communism and socialism will soon be little more than obscure follies." Guizot, *De la Démocratie en France* (1849), p. 66.

⁵⁴ † At the close of this brief sketch of the system of unbelief I

terminus of the Revolution doctrine, when it is free to run its natural course.

But in this logical unfolding do we now have the key to what actually came to pass? Certainly, if the theory was free to run its natural course. But was that the case? No. For the theory, being what it is, cannot but encounter objections—objections which, insofar as they arise from the constitution and requirements of man, from the nature of things, and from the ordinances of God, are insurmountable. These objections and the theory itself, taken together, are the two factors of the history. When I claim that this doctrine was the cause of the Revolution I am therefore referring to the Revolution ideas not as they

gladly endorse the relative praise given by Stahl to the hesitant party, even though they are in the wrong when measured by the theory: "The democratic party, which its liberal opponents dub the *party of anarchy*, offers in its turn a correct criticism of the liberals. . . . That the criticism which it levels against the liberal party is correct does not make the democratic party a correct one itself, however. To the contrary, the fact that it stands for a more thorough and more vigorous application of the Revolution principle means only that its error is but all the more flagrant and pestilent than that of the liberal party. There is nothing good in half-heartedness and irresolution, to be sure; but *the consistent form of the error will always be worse than a half-hearted embrace of it.*" *Die gegenwärtige Parteien*, p. 189, 191f. — Undoubtedly so. Only remember that the inconsistent ones prepare the way for the very things they abhor. Hence the saying of Stahl in his famous impromptu speech of 15 April 1850 [in the lower house of the Union Parliament meeting at Erfurt to draft a constitution for a new German Confederation]: "I am not afraid of the acute sickness of democracy; . . . I am afraid of the chronic illness of liberalism. It is not violent overthrow but gradual subversion that I fear." *Parlamentarische Reden*, p. 135.

were basked to ripeness in the brain of the philosopher or sophist but as they got entangled, rather, in a struggle with historical reality. Therefore, in order to anticipate the course of the Revolution—to sketch it even before taking cognizance of the events themselves—one must set the unfolding doctrine in the context, I do not say of contingent circumstances, but of its unavoidable collision with nature and law. This I should like to attempt in the next lecture, where I propose to show you why the unvarying principle must repeatedly transform itself and why these metamorphoses can be predicted with almost mathematical certainty from the double and conflicting operation of the Revolution's assault and Nature's resistance. If I am in some measure successful in that, I shall have cleared my way toward showing you,⁵⁵ by way of experimental verification, that through all the different phases of our Age of Revolution there does indeed run that very revolutionary thread whose presence and purport I have provisionally demonstrated only by an appeal to the verdict of logic.

⁵⁵ [Cf. Lectures XI-XIV.]

APPENDICES TO LECTURE IX

APPENDIX A: The Revolution: French or European? A translation of an unpublished fragment, Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, Collection Groen van Prinsterer, No. 59. See note 1, page 40, above.

First a few comments about the question whether the revolutionary spirit that raged in France was spread over Europe in general. Hints, thoughts. Not to convince you right away, more for your further reflection. To show the weight I attach to your objections.

This one extraordinarily weighty. — The question whether the revolutionary spirit that we observe in other nations was but the effect of the impulse and example of the French revolution, or whether we have to do instead with a general corruption which has so far, owing to special circumstances, become manifest particularly in France.

I maintain the latter. I believe that if one fails to appreciate the universality neither will he see the depth of the corruption among his own nation nor have a correct notion of the nature and proportions of the dangers that threaten us.

Moreover, one can so easily be deceived here. The revolutionary works that have made the greatest name for themselves are French writings. For 60 years it is France that has been the main seat of revolutionary practice. The reaction against the effects of the Revolution can so easily be confused with the application of anti-revolutionary principles.

I could appeal, regarding the general development, to what I have said thus far about the nature of the [pre-revolutionary] political order, the identity of principles, the direction taken by political science, culture and religion and Christendom in general. I could refer you to what I shall later have occasion to adduce regarding the universality of the revolutionary influences. But perhaps it is better to say something about it now; perhaps I have considered this universality in some respects too much as a sort of *postulate*; and later, when we trace the practice of the Revolution, we shall constantly be led back to France; because we have no specimen that compares to the French revolution. The more necessary, then, to preclude any misunderstanding by a clear explanation.

A priori:

Where several states form a close union as a result of origin, location and intercourse, unity of development cannot be absent.

E.g. in Greece. What differences between cities and tribes, what antagonism between Dorians and Ionians! What contrast between Athens and Sparta! Yet there was a Greek nationality; and it would be possible to show that those diverse tribes, landscapes and localities all contributed – not just by imitating each other but also through their own proper development – to the progress, stagnation and decline of the national life.

And would there not likewise, after the fall of the Roman Empire, have been unity and coherence among the European states, a European nationality? There was unity of *origin* (through the melting or dwelling together of the barbarians with the inhabitants of the Roman domains); unity of *development and vicissitudes* (resistance to the continual migrations of nomadic peoples; feudalism; crusades; rise of the towns; recovery of royal power); unity of *learning and culture* (chivalry; the influence of Antiquity; the universal use of Latin); unity of *religion* (with respect to it, common participation in every change).

Especially the last three centuries. Thus Heeren is right in calling his work a History of Europe's Political System and Political Association (preface, v; p. 18). (general criterion) Visible everywhere is the intermeshing or crossing of interests; shared turbulence and strife; the parallel development of learning, of culture; the diffusion of the same principles and ideas; even the blurring of the separate nationalities, so that Sterne compares them to worn-off coins. On what, then, would the hypothesis rest that the revolutionary current was proper well-nigh exclusively to France?

History confirms this reasoning.

This is evident if I have succeeded and continue to succeed in proving that in Protestant and Roman Catholic countries *unbelief* held sway among the upper classes over against a corrupted or vitiated Christianity; and that the Revolutionary theories *had* to arise from the unbelief.

Besides: *ubi rerum testimonia adsunt, non opus est verbis* [where the facts speak, there is no need for words]. We find those theories, prior to the French revolution, everywhere. In England, Germany, the Netherlands. Everything seemed ripe for a general upheaval. It was the constraint to self-defence against French-Jacobin arms that temporarily arrested further elaboration. France had *gone ahead*; the other nations,

even after the wars ceased, *lagged behind*. But to judge from the doctrines being preached today in England and in Germany, other nations will outstrip the French and the excesses of their Revolution. (Napoleon's comparison of himself to a *bookmark*). ["I am the bookmark at the page where the Revolution was arrested: when I am gone it will turn the page and resume its course."]

Let us look at *Germany* for a moment.

The same story. But scientific, and with apparent moderation: all the more dangerous for us; the Netherlands probably suffered more harm from Germany than from France—scholars and pastors captivated more by Germany.

Theology — see *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, 1836, pp. 345ff: "Abriss einer Geschichte der Umwälzung, welche seit 1750 auf dem Gebiete der Theologie in Deutschland stattgefunden" [Outline of a History of the Revolution in German Theology since 1750] by Tholuck. — In the first half of the 18th century there was still much that was good; but towards the middle of the century (thus contemporaneous with the actual rise of the Revolutionary theory in France) there was neither the firmness of the orthodox nor the warmth of the Pietists. So the soil was ready. According to him [Tholuck] the factors of change were: 1. the tenor of the Wolffian philosophy, which transposed faith too much to the arena of demonstration, of rational belief; 2. the writings of the English Deists; 3. the influence of France; 4. the reign of Frederick the Great; and 5. the example of *Semler*, who may be called the versatile father of Rationalism and Neology.

Similarly in other branches. — Later there will be occasion to show this with respect to constitutional theory and international law. I can also point to philosophy: *Lessing, Kant, Jacobi*; literature: *Wieland, Schiller, Goethe*; history: *Herder*; the periodical press: the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*.

Nevertheless we can appreciate a Gellert, Klopstock, Claudius, Lavater, Stilling, etc.: the 7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal.

Also Ernesti, also Heyne? According to Tholuck, Ernesti was not the man, however warmly disposed, to check unbelief by steadfastly upholding and powerfully acclaiming the truths of the Gospel.

Heyne. — No exception to what can be observed in most classicists of the time, who ignore the Gospel and despise it in comparison with the splendour of profane Antiquity. I have known exceptions, but is it likely that the spirit of the school of Wyttembach here in our country was very much different?

Enough. *Nomina sunt odiosa* [Names are hateful]: no needless personalities, provided we keep in mind that in our country people are sometimes rather too much afraid of personalities, when clarity requires naming persons and duty requires opposing them.

Not all who depart from the Gospel are freethinkers; but they are in the line that leads to freethinking.

Excuses. – They know not what they do; they live in a dangerous atmosphere. What they have abandoned in theory they sometimes retain, through a happy inconsistency, in practice. They abhor the consequences of their own teachings and labours; witness, e.g., Semler.

Mindful of the love we owe our neighbour, of the parable of the mote and the beam, of the words “Unto whomsoever much is given etc. [of him shall be much required],” and mindful of our own guilt, we must have the greatest possible forbearance towards other persons; and at the same time be uncompromising in condemning the doctrines they followed, if we know them to have been harmful.

The Revolution was a *European* revolution. There was turbulence and agitation everywhere. And if the fire opened an outlet for itself in France, we should not forget that the whole ground was volcanic.

APPENDIX B: The new meaning of “democracy.” Continuation of note 14, from page 48, above.

Speaking of “the party of *anarchy*” Guizot explains: “I do not wish to say ‘the *republican* party’ every time, even though it styles itself thus constantly; I shall not insult the Republic by giving its name to such a party.” *Mémoires*, III, 224; *Histoire parlementaire*, I, 263. – “Chaos hides itself today under one word: democracy. . . . The great evil of my country, the evil which lies at the bottom of all its ills, is the idolatry of democracy.” Guizot, *De la Démocratie en France*, pp. 8, 5. What Guizot is referring to is government by the numerical majority; see my *Grundwetherziening*, pp. 221f [“What Guizot is attacking here is not the preponderance or the absolute rule of some class; not democracy as it breaks the equilibrium between classes in favour of the lower class; not pure government-by-the-people, which occurs in ancient and modern history (not, usually, in a very attractive form) and which

assumes its place beside aristocracy and monarchy among the forms of government. It is not a matter of a struggle between classes but a question rather of the practical effect and influence of a doctrine which would destroy all distinctions of class by the proclamation of free and equal citizenship for all. The Revolution may have begun, in 1789, in the name of the third estate; it may have produced later, especially in 1830, the preponderance of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes; and it may have championed, in 1848, the rights of workingmen and proletarians: but one principle at all times predominated—freedom and equality for all. . . . What prevailed throughout was a conception of the State first formulated in a series of revolutionary writings and afterwards applied in a series of revolutionary constitutions, a conception of the State in which every man, every aristocrat, the king himself, everybody, whatever power might be entrusted to him and whatever privileges might be granted to him, is at bottom and by right, like the common day-labourer, no more and no less than an integral part, not of the historic Nation, but of the revolutionary People; an individual; a unit in the aggregate of units, the totality of which constitutes the Sovereign. This is democracy—in the sense now fashionable”.

“Power to the people” is unbelief’s formula for politics. “The task of the present time is not democracy; it is the defence of order and morality, which are the people’s real power against democracy.” Stahl. — Commenting on Chateaubriand’s phrase “*démocratie chrétienne*,” Vinet writes: “The epithet ‘Christian’ is of little account here; thus wed, an adjective is devoured by its substantive.” *Etudes sur la littérature française au dix-neuvième siècle*, I, 499.

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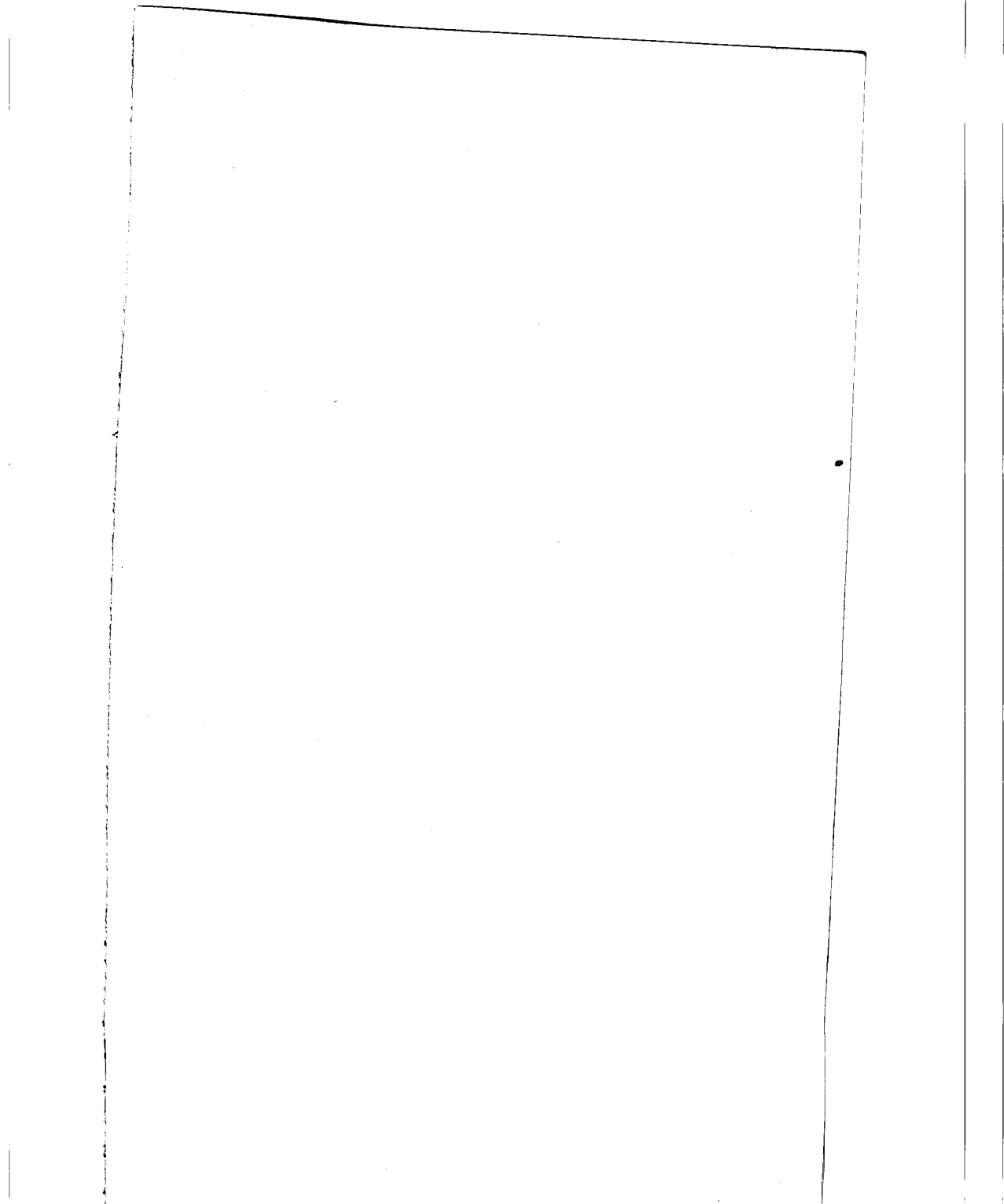
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“The Word applied to politics was new to me, and now that I
have placed that candle in the darkness I see sorry things, but
I see . . .”

— Aeneas baron Mackay (1847)