

[from Harry Neumann, *Liberalism*]

Chapter 16

Politics or Nothing! Nazism's Origin in Scientific Contempt for Politics

My teaching is mild against those without faith in it; it has no hell or threats. Those without faith are left with an empty, flighty life in their own consciousness.

–Nietzsche. [(*Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, V.2, p. 401)]

Churchill in 1940 feared that nazi victory would mean that

The whole world Including all that we have known and cared for; will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. [1]

Here Churchill really meant philosophy, not science. Science, unlike philosophy, cannot be perverted. The following statement by Churchill's enemy, Himmler, is closer to the heart of science:

If the state or party declared that a certain view must be regarded as the desired starting point of scientific research, that view must be accepted as a scientific axiom and there must be no shilly-shallying about it....Science proceeds from hypotheses that change every year or two. So there is no earthly reason why the party should not lay down a particular hypothesis as a starting point, even if it runs counter to current scientific opinion....The one and only thing that matters to us...is to have ideas that strengthen our people in their national pride.[2]

Himmler's brand of political liberalism (pseudo-science) means that any faith, no matter how exotic, can become the hypothesis to be scientifically tested. He believed that it proved itself scientifically by destroying competing hypotheses or

“ideologies.” Here he is mistaken. The same reason responsible for Churchill’s false belief in a science capable of being perverted is responsible for Himmler’s claim that his hypothesis (or any opinion about anything) can prove itself scientifically valid. Similarly Marx believed his concept of historical inevitability was scientifically verifiable and Hitler demanded biological proof of his racial theories. Heisenberg summed up this pseudo-science in his view that science springs from arbitrary faith to prove which the scientist is prepared to risk his life.[3] Real scientific proof occurs, according to Himmler and Heisenberg, in this always hazardous way.

In the 1953 publication of lectures given in 1935, Heidegger, who probably regarded himself as the only Nazi, attacked pseudo-nazis in the name of nazism:

The works offered everywhere today as the philosophy of national socialism actually have nothing to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely the meeting of global technology and modern man). They have been written by men fishing in the murky waters of values and universals (or wholes).[4]

I suggest the following interpretation of Heidegger’s nazism.

Only real nazism is sufficiently courageous to incorporate the apolitical or anti-political thrust of science or global technology. As such it has nothing but contempt for all values (any notion of good and bad, right and wrong, true and false) or wholes or universals (anything political, anything common or communicable). Since politics always is concerned with such things, true nazis are radically apolitical. In its contempt for politics, nazism is one with science which emerges when anyone from cavemen to contemporaries declares his independence from philosophy.

Prior to this declaration of independence, there is no science as such. Instead there is aristotelian, epicurean, stoic, thomist, newtonian, einsteinian, christian science, etc. Each of these pseudo-sciences is subordinated to some more or less clearly articulated philosophic (or theological) theory about the universe. Each subordinates science’s radically private, incommunicable core to a hypothesis or theory, a philosophic effort to communicate something common to the whole universe.

The reason for scientific rejection of philosophic or theological supervision is

made clear in Spinoza's condemnation of theologians who teach nothing

but speculations of Platonists and Aristotelians to which they have made Holy Writ conform; not content to rave with the Greeks themselves, they want to make the prophets rave also By laying down beforehand as a foundation for the study and true interpretation of the Scripture, the principle that is in every passage true and divine. [5]

Spinoza knew that neither Plato nor Aristotle regarded every passage in any book, including the Bible, as true and divine. His remark is meant rather to condemn the political and therefore unscientific thrust of both Greek philosophy and medieval theology. Both that philosophy and theology claim to discern in things a divine or natural identity or being independent of experience or will: Things retain their permanent identity or wholeness no matter what anyone experiences about them or what they experience about themselves.

Contrary to this philosophic view, science is the simple realization that whatever is experienced – a self, a world, the law of contradiction, a god, or anything else – is nothing apart from its being experienced. When students complain of “identity crises,” I tell them not to worry, since neither they nor anyone else has an identity about which to have a crisis! For science, genuine knowledge of reality, reveals a world of nothing but empty experiences, impressions as Hume called them.

Unaware that science reveals a nihilist world, pseudo-scientists, like Himmler or Heisenberg, strive to prove their faith or hypotheses scientifically. By this proof they seek its legitimation, its political acceptability in regimes whose propaganda, that is, education makes the “educated” respect this legitimation. Their respect springs from their education's obfuscation of a scientific nihilism for which all their goals – whether democratic, communist, nazi, or anything else – are empty reveries.

This obfuscation encourages them to believe that science or technology are merely means to implement their favorite moral-political goals. In reality these means reveal the nothingness of their goals. That is all science ever proves or can prove in its nihilist world. Futile efforts to do more, to support one's cherished moral-political cause with scientific proof, mistakes science's propaganda, its bid for moral-political respectability, for its nihilist core. Misunderstood as mere means, science or technology really is a Trojan Horse, a Sorcerer's Apprentice, which negates the ends it supposedly serves!

Except for realization of life's nihilism, no scientific proofs or discoveries exist. This simple, unsophisticated realization – and it alone – is science! No other truth is provable or discoverable in a universe where nothing prevents anything from changing into anything else or into the nothingness which everything always is. For example, there would be no real change if, as in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, men became insects.

In reality, neither men nor insects nor anything else is anything but empty experiences or reveries. Only deluded fools “fishing in the murky waters of values and wholes or universals (*Ganzheiten*)” discern integrity or wholeness where actually there is nothing. Their error blurs “the inner truth and greatness of national socialism,” the effort to incorporate into one's life the nihilism at the core of science or global technology:

Compared to the importance of this battle everything else is of no concern: the final question about the conditions of life is raised here and the first attempt is made here to answer this question experimentally. To what extent can truth endure incarnation? – that is the question, that is the experiment.[6]

Can men grasp life's nothingness without destroying themselves?: “We are making an experiment with the truth. Perhaps mankind will be destroyed by it! Fine!” [7] Mankind's destruction or the destruction of all life would change nothing in a nihilist reality. Nietzsche's experiment with the truth is the same as Heidegger's inner truth and greatness of nazism. That experiment means to determine whether a few supermen can become alive to the truth without self-destruction. It does not mean to prove the truth experimentally. Nothing – and only nothing! – can be proven in science's nihilist reality.

Unlike Nietzsche, the unscientific cling to their faith that their arbitrary hypotheses or ideologies can somehow be validated in practice. Both half-hearted nazis and communists are characterized by desperate determination to make their empty reveries seem more than merely private experiences. Thus Rudolph Hess whose suicide at Spandau sealed his fanatic loyalty to Hitler as the greatest leader of all time originally created the apotheosis of this *Fuhrer*. As aware of Hitler's deficiencies as any intelligent British subject is of those of his queen, Hess nevertheless insisted that his life is meaningless unless men create, as it were *ex nihilo*, the infallible tyrant to be revered by them.

Deprived by nihilist science of the possibility of appealing to something akin to the divine right of kings, Hess had to create his version of divine right by force of will alone. The alternative in a nihilist world is anarchy and chaos.

Pseudo-nazis such as Hess, whose fanaticism was sparked by fear of reality's nihilism, prefer their communist counterparts to democratic liberals or traditional conservatives. Both share the desperate need to create political life ex nihilo, since no divine or natural justification for politics exists. Both rebel against the nothingness which genuine science finds at life's core. Both flee to forms of humanist creativity or scientific technology, futile efforts to appease their political passions by creating something commanding moral-political respectability in their communities. Technology's "wonders" give science a patina of redeeming social value, a politically effective propaganda in contemporary regimes. Hess's form of this propaganda is fired by the determination to force life's nothingness to be something – to be political – or to destroy the world in this futile effort!

The communist version of this fanatic futility is caught by Whitaker Chambers's description of Bukharin's last words (in Stalin's 1938 purge trial) to the court condemning him to death. The only thing Chambers admired in Bukharin was this final apology:

I do not understand how men, knowing that another man spoke these words at such a moment, can read them and fail to be rent apart by their meaning . . . I would print them bold and hang them at the front of college classrooms . . . Bukharin, it must be remembered is literally innocent . . . It is his uncommitted crime that he pleads guilty to. He said: "I shall now speak of myself, of the reasons for repentance . . . For when you ask yourself: 'If you must die, what are you dying for?' – an absolutely black vacuity suddenly rises before you with startling vividness. There was nothing to die for if one wanted to die unrepentant . . . this, in the end disarmed me completely and led me to bend my knees before the party and the country. And when you ask yourself: 'Very well, suppose you do not die; suppose by some miracle you remain alive, again for what? Isolated from everybody, an enemy of the people, in an inhuman position, completely isolated from everything that constitutes the essence of life.' And at such moments, Citizen Judges, everything personal, all personal encrustation, all rancor, pride and a number of other things fall away, disappear . . ."

Chambers comments: "Is there not a stillness in the room where you read this?"

That is the passing of the wings of tragedy.” [8].

Bukharin’s political needs, fanaticized by his awareness of reality’s nihilism, prevented him from confronting his judges as Jesus or Socrates had. The same is true of Hess’s willed dependence on Hitler, a desperate loyalty unto death. Hess’s and Bukharin’s realization of reality’s “black vacuity” makes it impossible for them to be Socratic or Christian gadflies, bearing witness to a truth, or search for truth, able to save men. Their only salvation is desperate willing of it ex nihilo.

It is precisely this fanatic ex nihilo willing which obfuscates what Heidegger called the “inner truth and greatness of national socialism . . . by fishing in the murky waters of values and universals.” Nazis strive to incorporate their nihilism, as Nietzsche did, not to will its obfuscation as Hess and Bukharin did:

The spirit of national socialism was not so much concerned with the national and the social but much more with that radically private resoluteness which rejects any discussion or mutual understanding because it relies wholly and only on itself . . . At bottom all its concepts and words are the expression of the bitter and hard resoluteness of a will asserting itself in the face of its own nothingness, a will proud of its loathing for happiness, reason and compassion. [9]

That ALL nazism’s concepts and thoughts express ONLY this “bitter and hard” will cannot be emphasized too strongly. They do not express things or truths existing apart from that resoluteness. Nothing – and only nothing – exists in nazism’s scientific reality. Nazism’s will asserts itself in the face of its own nothingness.

Chambers wrongly saw tragedy in this nihilist willing. Neither Hess or Bukharin nor Nietzsche or Heidegger are tragic. The tragic fate or family curse of an Agamemnon or an Oedipus was radically political – as everything serious in life is. Oedipus and Agamemnon were serious men and therefore open to tragedy precisely because they experienced themselves as pious kings and fathers, the chief defenders of their sacred cities and families. Had they perceived themselves, as Nietzsche and Hess did, as nihilist individuals free to will anything, there would be no tragedy: Anything could be freely willed or unwilled at any time. Nothing is serious that cannot be ridiculous if one wills it to be so. Precisely this nihilist, and therefore apolitical or comic, resoluteness constitutes the inner truth and greatness of national socialism. Nihilist scientists are the only nazis!

Politics always is serious and potentially, if not actually, tragic. The main political passion, moral indignation, the hatred of enemies and craving for vengeance against them, springs from the political faith that one has or needs common goods without which life is not worth living. Hatred and desire for revenge is the natural reaction against enemies, those threatening one's common or political good. Consider Psalm 137.

That hatred and vengeance, the heart of politics, makes no sense in nazis who share the apolitical bent which the political theologian, Carl Schmitt, condemned in the political romantic:

Neither logical distinctions nor moral value judgments, nor political decisions are possible for him. The chief source of political vitality, faith in justice and indignation against injustice do not exist for him . . . He lacks the feeling for the justice of his own cause as well as every social self-feeling . . . In his world all political or religious differences dissolve into interesting ambiguities . . . Here everything is interchangeable with everything else.
[10]

Nietzsche demanded a superman capable of destroying "the chief source of political vitality, faith in justice and indignation against injustice." He placed the responsibility for that faith and indignation in the spirit of revenge:

That man be saved from the desire for revenge: That is for me the bridge to the highest hope . . . *The spirit of revenge* that has been till now man's best reflection . . . Everywhere where responsibility or reasons were sought it was *the spirit of revenge* doing the seeking. Over millennia this spirit of revenge has achieved such a mastery over mankind that all metaphysics, psychology, conceptions of history but above all morality is stigmatized by it. As far as man has thought he has dragged the bacillus of revenge into things . . . [w]e others who wish to win back for becoming its innocence wish to be the missionaries of a purer thought: That nothing has given man his qualities, neither god, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself – that nothing is responsible for him. There is no being (*Wesen*) that could be made responsible for anyone's existing or being the way he is . . . There is no purpose, no sense for our being . . . This is the great solace, in this lies the innocence of all existence. [11]

A world purged of moral indignation and responsibility, science's nihilist reality, makes impossible non-arbitrary goods or evils, friends or enemies. To have such goods in that world and to have enemies against which to defend them, one must will them out of reality's nothingness. This desperate willfulness is the fanatic determination to do the impossible, to break out of the empty privacy which is nazism's inner truth and greatness.

In any human or bestial herd, the main concern of herd members always is to get or to preserve what is good for themselves. The "themselves" here are not experienced as isolated, nihilist individuals who are nothing more than a chaos of arbitrary sentiments or experiences. The herd member's self-knowledge is political. It is of himself as a father and citizen, a member of his herd. Thus obtaining or preserving what is good for himself is interpreted in terms of communal or political, not private, goods. No real privacy is available to, or desired by, herd members; everything crucial in their lives is political.

Philosophy, as distinct from science, is the political effort to think through, to seriously question, the common goods responsible for rootedness in one's herd. It is this rootedness's compulsion which makes herd members believe that they have selves and inhabit a world which exists as more than empty reveries. In that political world, the main concern of all bestial or human herd members is obtaining and defending their common or political good.

Unlike unphilosophic herd members, philosophers, that is philosophic herd members do not unquestioningly accept what their herd believes to be right and good. They transform their herd's main concern, to live the good or pious life, into a question. They doubt their herd's claim to answer this question, to know what is good for its members. However, in the decisive respect, philosophic herd members sided with their unphilosophic brethren by embracing the illusion that their political good exists as something more than nihilistic reveries. Like all herd members, philosophers are shaped by what Nietzsche called the spirit of revenge.

Unlike scientists knowledgeable about reality's nihilism, philosophers never doubt the existence of a true moral-political good for their herd, however difficult or even impossible it may be to adequately ascertain this good. Since they obtain this fundamental certainty not by self-evident insight but by a political faith shared by all herd members, they remain philosophers, seekers after wisdom or knowledge. As such, they claim to know that their political good is the highest object of knowledge, although they do not know it adequately. In Socrates' words, they

know what they do not know. In any case, the illusion created by their herd membership precludes scientific realization of reality's nihilism. They remain philosophers, not scientists; political men, not nihilists.

When Churchill spoke of perverted science, he meant philosophy, not science which is nihilist and therefore incapable of being perverted or improved. How can a reality consisting of nothing but empty reveries suffer improvement or perversion? There is neither scientific progress nor regress. What passes for scientific or technological progress is nothing but window-dressing, propaganda to make science's nihilism palatable in the illusory realm created by political faith.

That faith compels a Hess or a Bukharin (and all political men) to fear the privacy of nihilism's apolitical world. They are repelled by the radical isolation caused by Nietzsche's experimental efforts to realize truth's nihilism. Yet that solitude's silence or unintelligible, or merely private noises is more scientific than any so-called scientific theory or hypothesis.

This liberal silence or privacy obviously is easier for an artist to reveal than for a philosopher whose illiberal orientation it disrupts. This is especially true of the graphic work (the stark black and white woodcuts, etchings and lithographs) of Max Beckmann or Walter Gramatte, the stickmen or greymen of George Grosz [12]. The most perceptive artists, especially those among the German expressionists, catch, insofar as it is catchable, the artist's confrontation with the emptiness of his self and of reality as such. This encounter is best seen in the harsh, graphic self-portraits of Beckmann and Gramatte. Hess and Bukharin's desperate fear and hatred of this nothingness is "beautifully" shown in Grosz's *Ecce Homo*.

Artists such as Beckmann, Gramatte and Grosz are more scientific (liberal) than Aristotle, Newton or Einstein who mean to present communicable theories or hypotheses. Their artistic insight into life's nihilism precludes anything really communicable. What is communicable is the horror of the confrontation with nihilism depicted in their art. They realize that they themselves and the world in which they live is nothing but nihilist experiences. Their political passions are nauseated by this realization. Their art, especially the self-portraits mentioned above, is the bitter confrontation of those passions with their own nothingness. At their best, they simply show the confrontation stark and unembellished. Encouraging no nihilist drives to overcome nihilism, they leave artist and observer, insofar as he has eyes to see, with nothing. They are far too scientific to cater to

the usual pseudo-scientific expectations responsible for a communicable, politically comprehensible “science.”

In this they antagonize not only pseudo-scientists and other political men whose terror at genuine science’s nihilism demands faith in a world in which theories can be tested or communicated, in which scientists (and others) can work with each other and for each other. They also differ from humanist artists and intellectuals who, while agreeing that the external world is empty, nevertheless find a wealth of meaning in their own inner life. These are the apostles of self-expression, “finding one’s real self.” Thus so-called non-objective or abstract art often denies the meaningfulness of objects, of the external world, while Beckmann or Gramatte, unlike Klee or Kandinsky, realize that their inner selves are as devoid of substance or meaning as the external world. No inner integrity or complexity exists in reality’s nihilism. Only men alive to life’s total nothingness are as scientific – as knowledgeable about reality – as men can be. Other intellectuals, whether “scientists” or humanists, artists or computer experts, are not more than conscious or unconscious propagandists. Genuine education, Nietzsche’s experiment to incorporate truth’s nihilism, requires elimination of their propaganda: “I would drive out of my ideal state the so-called ‘educated’ just as Plato drove out the poets: This is my terrorism.” [13]

Education liberated from that propaganda, the only truly liberal education, reveals that the price of being moral or political is fanatic determination to avoid self-knowledge. The more political men divine life’s nihilism, the stronger this fanaticism. A Lincoln or a Churchill are not gripped by the desperation moving a Hess or a Bukharin. Once alive to it, they cease experiencing themselves as political. Then the effort to be political becomes fanaticism which, consciously or unconsciously, confuses or destroys politics. Thus Hitler’s apolitical aim was not victory over what common sense politics would call Germany’s enemies. It was destruction of Jews, not a German or European victory over democrats or communists.

In this spirit, Hitler ordered that German trains be used primarily to transport Jews to death camps and only secondarily to fight a two or three front war. In his nihilist reveries, the defense of Germany’s political borders against democratic and communist armies was secondary. Nobody realized better than Hess that his canonization of Hitler meant fanatic loyalty to such arbitrary goals invented by Hitler’s fear of nihilism. That fear links Hess, Hitler, Bukharin and all men determined to be political in an apolitical world.

Nietzsche's hope for Prussians and for Germany was sparked by his awareness of the apolitical resoluteness which they share with all nihilist politics:

To be loyal (or true – *Treue*) and for the sake of loyalty to stake one's blood and honor even on evil and dangerous enterprises – teaching itself this lesson, another people disciplined itself and in so disciplining itself became pregnant and heavy with great hopes. [14]

Notes

1. W. Churchill, *Blood Sweat and Tears* (New York: Putnam's, 1941) p. 314.
2. H. Rauschnigg, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: Putnam's, 1940) p. 227.
3. W. Heisenberg, *Das Naturbild der Heutigen Physik*, Rowohlts Deutsche Enzyklopaedie (Hamburg, 1955) pp.44-45.
4. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1953) p. 152.
5. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Preface.
6. Nietzsche, *Joyful Science*, 110, 51, 319, 324, 374
7. Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin, 1967 ff.) VII 2, p. 84.
8. W.F. Buckley, Jr. *Odyssey of Friend* (New York, 1969) p. 163.
9. K. Lowith, "Der Okkasionelle Dezisionismus von C. Schmitt," *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960) pp. 122-123.
10. C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Berlin: Dunker und Humboldt, Third Edition, 1968) pp. 177-178, 222.
11. Nietzsche, "On the Tarantulas" and "On Redemption," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II:7, 20; *Will to Power*, 765.
12. Neumann, "The Price of Freedom: A Note on George Grosz and Edward Hopper," *Newsletter of the Graphic Arts Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Vol. 12 #2 (1977) pp. 1-7.
13. Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin, 1967 ff.) III 3, p. 172.
14. Nietzsche, "On the Thousand and One Goals," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I:15.