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The Problem of Violence and the Structure of Rationality: Philosophical Remarks

In memory of my friends Merab Mamardashvili and Fr Aleksandr Men’*

YURI SENOKOSOV

‘In order to pick an apple,’ said Montesquieu, ‘you chop down the apple tree. That is the principle of despotism.’ However, does this principle still provide an explanation for the questions we are asking today about the nature of violence in the twentieth century? No matter how cruel a traditional despot was, his cruelty was limited to his personal whim and did not undermine the foundations of the existing way of life. Such a man might well have been treacherous to his subjects and neighbours, he might have robbed and killed, but he would not have dared to destroy the age-old traditions of peasant labour (as occurred, for example, in Soviet Russia); nor did he attack the people’s established ideas of the world. That was because he knew that to do so would undoubtedly threaten the foundations of his own power and government. In other words, however cruel his actions might have been, they were always explicable in some way as part of the rational means by which man, as a finite and evil being, is able to survive and take charge of his own life. But how can we explain or understand the scale and nature of the repressions that took place in the USSR under Stalin with reference to the idea of state expediency? Could any normal human mind justify the never-ending list of victims who were sacrificed, supposedly for the sake of the future?

There is no doubt that only while experiencing profound horror and fear could anyone find all this acceptable or really believe in the necessity of evil. It was the Terror and the fear it generated that formed the consciousness of millions of Soviet people during the Stalinist epoch – that much is clear – forcing them to become the builders of the socialist system. Then again, however, we have to ask why all this took place – in the name of what?

The violence and cruelty of the twentieth century will remain inexplicable, in my opinion, as long as we keep looking for an explanation in the traditional sources of knowledge, in already existing concepts, which seem to explain a great deal. These include the intellectual obtuseness and liberal delusions of those, both in the USSR and in the West, who justified the Stalinist regime in the 1930s and later, and of whom it is usual to say nowadays that they were ignorant of what was going on at the time.

A full explanation of human moral blindness and self-delusion can be found in the traditional system of values and thought, known as classical reason, in which means

*This article was originally delivered as a paper at the seminar ‘The Moral Lessons of Soviet History: the Experience of Opposition to Evil, Caux, Switzerland, 1992 (see *RSS*, Vol. 21, Nos 3–4, 1993, pp. 355–365.

and ends are definitely linked. It is assumed that ends are self-evident, within the sphere of an individual's understanding of his own needs, wishes, instincts, passions and so on, and can be achieved, or not, by specific means. In each particular case the total result and its separate elements are still within the realm of the explicable. They are understandable in human terms. However, the Stalinist phenomenon itself was neither explicable nor understandable. For example, as I have already said, it did not follow from the idea of state expediency, in any of its Machiavellian interpretations. The scale of the violence committed and its nature can find no comparison. It remains outside the realm of what is comprehensible to human beings, if they are acting on the basis of the existing intellectual culture and its cognitive schemes.

Consequently, we must try to find certain basic ways of describing this phenomenon, but not merely in terms of a criticism of the past or of a moral sermon addressed to intellectuals or politicians. Our aim is not to expose the latter, but to develop concepts that will help to make what happened somewhat clearer and render it intelligible. In short, we obviously need to find a way of broadening our stock of concepts and ways of working so that we go beyond the limitations of the classical cast of mind and so that we can introduce any given indivisible lived event into the sphere of analysis. Certain postulates and concepts need to be added to the analytical apparatus which we normally use to form our assessments of society and history. I repeat, this has nothing to do with feeling indignant or starting again from scratch: it concerns our ability to understand. We cannot begin to think anew or start history again, in the absolute sense. By definition, philosophy cannot be irrational, because any elucidation or definition of terms is impossible by irrational means. History comes into being through the act of thinking, through placing oneself as the link between everything that has taken place, and this ability is strengthened and consolidated by rational means. Strictly speaking, that is why the art of philosophy is experiencing a renewal. In philosophy nothing is decided or concluded once and for all. The theorem of Pythagoras no longer needs to be proved, it has already been proved. Philosophy, however, exists and is formulated in order to develop the element of living philosophical consciousness that precedes proof and is in fact second nature to every person engaged in scientific work.

In my opinion, a revolutionary can legitimately be defined as someone who is not willing to be good and wise if the whole world is absurd. Everyone around him must be good and wise before he consents to be so; only then will he feel that his life and struggle have any meaning. Otherwise, according to him, life is meaningless, the world is immoral and it would be better not to be alive. As we well know, ideas of this kind about universal human happiness on earth have inspired more than one generation of revolutionaries. At the end of the nineteenth century one of the founders of the Russian social-democratic movement, Pavel Aksel'rod, wrote as follows to his friend and fellow-thinker G. Plekhanov:

I am for the revolution, not out of love, but out of hatred for the immorality of the present system and love of the future system, which I see as an ideal. If there is no god who created the universe – and thank God there isn't, for with tsars, we can at least cut off their heads, but we can no longer do anything about that despot Jehovah – we shall produce a race of gods on earth, beings omnipotent in intellect and will, delighting in their own consciousness and self-awareness, capable of comprehending the world by means of thought and ruling it – that is the psychological basis of all my spiritual and social aspirations, plans and actions.¹

This clear admission expresses, in my opinion, the essence of the Russian dogma, which is communist as well as eschatological. The Russian people were subjected for centuries to a system of serf-like dependence, and they truly believed that evil forces were ruling on this earth, while the forces of good were awaiting the City of the Future, the kingdom of righteousness. It was just these expectations, which are not based on the spirit of the Gospel but are irrational in origin, which found a natural fulfilment, 60 years after the abolition of serfdom, in the idea of building a communist society. All that remained was to channel these expectations into the right direction, as the Bolsheviks did, on the basis of the ideology and repressive state institutions they devised.

Two things appear to be especially important from the historical viewpoint. One is the inability of the social institutions of the time and of Russian culture in general to resist the socialist movement, because of the weakness of the liberal tradition in the country. Then there was the attraction and accessibility of the communist ideal against the background of liberal values. Liberalism in Russia has never aroused particular enthusiasm, as few people have believed that political freedom and enlightenment alone, without the help of an organised armed struggle, are capable of destroying the massive despotic state that has become established over the centuries. It is only by taking these circumstances into account that we can also understand the fatal hostility of the Russian Revolution towards private property – that basis for the development of liberalism. After the abolition of serfdom private property as an institution turned out to be lacking in defences in two respects: it was rejected by the intelligentsia, who were fascinated by the idea of socialist reconstruction of society; and it was not accepted by the popular masses, who lacked the relevant experience. There are those who hold that at present Russia does not need the restoration of private property even though it would apparently be easy. They are right. What is needed is something more difficult – the establishment of private property. It must be established as a necessity of life, as something the people need, by passing appropriate laws and thus increasing the political and economic rights and freedoms of citizens.

It seems, though, that the aim of the socialist idea (or classes) was once to achieve and increase precisely these rights and freedoms. Why, then, did the socialist idea lead to the rise of a totalitarian regime in Russia? To explain this by reference to Russia's historical form of government, its character and defects, means to understand the reason for the struggle against that form of rule, as well as the aim of that struggle, but not its consequences. It is impossible, as I said above, to justify those consequences, to use simple common sense to understand them. We must take into account the fact that the revolutionary pathos and faith in the 'bright future' which were typical of European (as well as Russian) supporters of the *Communist Manifesto*, who were to an equal extent infected by the idea of class conflict, nevertheless did not lead in England and France, for example, to the catastrophe that took place in Russia.

Inasmuch as the stimulus and catalyst of social attitudes at that time was the ideology of progress, which was nourished by faith in science, let us look at the ideological aspect of the problem.

Following established practice, we usually describe the initial period in the development of revolutionary socialist ideas as utopian and its representatives – Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and so on – as utopian socialists. At the same time, we assume that only Marx and Engels overcame their utopianism in that they proved scientifically that it was necessary for mankind to adopt communism by revealing the force capable of effecting that change – the proletariat – and by creating the doctrine of the

socialist revolution. Although it is clear, if we remember the moral, ethical side of that doctrine, that it too was utopian, it had already acquired an incontrovertible and militant character, because it was supposed to be capable of proof: that was what made it different.

What in fact lay at the root of Marx's 'scientific communism' – that distinctive weapon of social vengeance – and constituted its essence? First is the idea that any person is the product of social development, which determines his character and behaviour; second, that all evil (individual and social) is due to the structure of the given social system. Consequently, while that system exists, people are not responsible for their own actions and their efforts should be directed towards overthrowing it. In other words, the idea of human individual responsibility has been replaced by the problem of a radical mechanical transformation of society.

For all that, as far as the homelands of socialism – England and France – were concerned, the spread of communist and socialist ideas in these countries was not only characterised from the start by apologias and by attempts to put them into practice (by founding various kinds of 'unions', charitable mutual aid associations and so on), but was also controlled by legislation. It was regulated by the given culture, which was based on two lifebuilding principles: the concept of legal rights and the Christian doctrine of free will. Having recognised at some point that both human nature and life in society are in principle imperfect, people in these countries rejected the idea of eradicating evil on earth and began instead to try to limit it, relying not only on religious teachings but also on the institution of law as a means of resolving social conflicts and defending property.

In Europe, then, national life, with all its inevitable social contradictions, has been imbued with the concepts of legality and legal rights, and I would argue that this has been a factor in holding back socialism in Europe. In France in particular socialism has developed on the basis of strict state regulation. It is characteristic that the famous statement attributed to Louis XIV ('L'état – c'est moi') has helped the French at the most difficult periods of their history. However, this formula for absolutism has not prevailed, because of the spirit of rational doubt (*à la* Descartes), which is just as strong a cultural factor. As a result, in the course of time, not only was a reasonably complex political mechanism created, but a corresponding tradition of limiting absolute power also developed. In England a similar role in limiting supreme power has been played historically by Parliament, and also by that spirit of experimental empirical knowledge which is characteristic of the English and their culture. Insofar as European culture is a Christian culture, it no longer pays attention to the wisdom, goodness or stupidity of its rulers. European society has developed in a manner that makes it increasingly good – for it is not they who are in charge of an enlightened Europe. Or we could even say we have an enlightened Europe – that is, an educated, modern European society – precisely to the extent that those in power are not the most educated, wise and good. The course and pattern of the modern history of European societies are invariably the same in this respect. And what is this historical development based on? Not on the application of good or perfect minds to the problems of society, but on the empirically regulated relationship that has developed between state and civic institutions, which have experimentally put into practice specific human possibilities and capabilities. This empirically regulated game is what really rules in Europe. These are the real European values and achievements. When there are discussions about the status of the intellect in Europe, they refer, of course, to its status within a framework of functioning social, economic and historical forces – as long as those forces are not blind or instinctive. However, neither blindness nor

instinctiveness are by-products of the modern European's participation in the playing-out of the Christian mystery – the mystery play of human freedom in history. This freedom is not simply self-evident, and hence the European model has its own particular by-product, namely the proliferation of popular masses who are not in touch with the sources of their own existence. They are not inwardly in contact (through the established system of education) and therefore form a kind of alien substance within society. This is the main European problem of the twentieth century (in contrast to Russia, where the main problem remains, as before, the overcoming or elimination of evil and violence).

Why is this? It is because the high productivity of modern society and the mass replication of its results throughout Europe mean that society is capable of supporting an ever-growing number of people who are in fact doing nothing, as the existence of the 'universal welfare state' with its developed system of social support demonstrates. However, those whom this state and system support are people who are also troubled by problems of identity; they need to develop the capacity for self-respect, but by nature their participation in civilisation is quite mechanical. In what sense? In that they do not usually think about the true conditions of their own existence. How does a machine differ from a spiritual or conscious being, however? It works, but it cannot explain its own existence. This is something mechanical, then, an alien body, which reproduces itself in the same manner as European life as such, insofar as European regeneration is not uniform: it always includes some people who are different from others, because they have made greater efforts in the cause of freedom. Thus, historically, the very need for a revolutionary approach to the solution of social problems seems to have been deprived of meaning.

In Russia, on the other hand, we come up against a fundamental contradiction when we use traditional concepts to try to understand the nature of revolutionary violence unleashed in order to establish social justice; this still remains a problem (in contrast to Europe) because the phenomenon of illusory existence, as a mere reflection of real life, is a total one. Phantom concepts born of the longing to make all men wise and happy retain their former names – freedom, democracy, peace, justice – but in reality they have become antibodies, anticoncepts. You cannot drink 'milk through the looking glass' – that is quite clear. However, it does exist, Lewis Carroll tells us, and is still called milk. This kind of 'antiworld', created in the imaginations of lonely individuals, was once imposed on millions of people in the USSR, who really used to believe that the victory of socialism in Russia was inevitable. For decades they had it drummed into their heads that 'the Decembrists awakened Gertsen', that Gertsen unfurled the banner of revolutionary agitation, which was taken up by the revolutionary intellectuals and then by the Bolsheviks, in order to 'crush that vermin, the tsarist monarchy' (Lenin). They considered it all absolutely justified from the standpoint of the future victory of socialism throughout the world, as they were convinced that they were in possession of the truth for all time. The people who created this new system had in the past escaped from tsarist prisons and therefore, as the author of a new book on Bukharin has rightly noted, they created prisons from which it was impossible to escape. They despised the laws of the former state and therefore created courts which were based not on law, but on the revolutionary conscience of the victorious class. They found strength in their closed ranks, their dissidence and nonconformity and therefore constructed a totalitarian society in which all closing of ranks, dissidence and nonconformity were immediately declared 'deviations' and mercilessly liquidated.² At one time these people carried on an underground struggle against the state. Underground activity was their natural way of life, so they created a

vindictive form of power that inspired fear and emerged into the daylight only when proclaiming its own might and celebrating its victories – until the fantastic state they had created collapsed on top of them, destroying them and wiping them off the face of the earth.

How are we going to survive this truly fantastic evil and overcome it, so that, in Nietzsche's words, we can avoid 'reverting to monsters'?

Clearly, in order to achieve an understanding of this phenomenon, as I have already said, we must undertake an additional spiritual assessment of the process, thus giving birth to something new, even if other things continue as before. Lobachevsky's understanding of geometry developed independently of the traditional ideas and concepts of Euclid's geometry. In order to achieve this, however, we must certainly first stand back from the very idea of 'continuity', as something apparently self-evident. It then becomes clear that even the historical destiny of Marxism, for example, has not been the result of the uninterrupted continuous advance of Marxist ideas as such. The moral collapse of Marxism as a political theory is obvious, of course; there is no question about it. Nevertheless, it can be discussed if, quite apart from Marxism, we try to explain the appearance – if we can describe it that way – of a particular variety of mutant on the plains of Russia and then, on that basis, return to those Marxist ideas and see how they were broken up and found a different destiny. In fact, however, that destiny is not attributable, in my view, to even the most amoral utilization of Marxist ideas. In the same way, the formation of the Third International, for example, is not to be explained as the end-point of the development of social-democratic thought even though this might seem to explain it 'psychologically'.

In order to break out of this vicious circle, we need to address the very structures of rational thought. We need to abandon not just 'psychology', but also such concepts as 'continuity' and 'development'; we must look at the way thinking takes place, through what we might describe, in the Gospel tradition, as the power of the word. For only thought, based on man's capabilities in his eternal present, as symbolised by religion, can work out empirically how to create really rational forms of social and cultural life.

Let us take as an example the 'thought event' linked with a particular law, since it is clear that for any law there must first be a citizen – that is, a person who fits into the world of laws, who is acquainted with their basic meaning and origin, 'born against the right background'. Here the symmetry or balance of the law is clearly visible: the means is the end, the end the means. On the one hand, this citizen has a duty to participate in civic affairs, and on the other hand, he is capable of such participation, in that he respects the freedom of others and their thoughts and can see himself and his concerns through their eyes as well as his own. The freedom and democratic rights of others are a condition of my own freedom as a citizen and vice versa. Strange as it may seem, democracy and human friendship have the same characteristics: mutual tolerance and respect. In the one case it is simply based on freely given mutual trust: friendship is, in its way, a self-sufficient phenomenon in this world. In the other case, that of democracy, which grows out of society's recognition of each man's civil rights and freedoms, the said rights and freedoms need to be legally defended because of the inevitable conflict and clash of human interests.

How is this to be achieved, though? What can we summon to our aid?

Obviously it can be done first of all by clearly separating the power of words from that of the law. In the New Testament we come upon the apparently very strange statement that until Christ came, the law was supreme, and there were prophets, but that now the Kingdom of God has come with power. This in fact resolves the prob-

lem of good and evil, or of violence and tolerance. At any rate, according to the Apostle Paul good and evil appear after the law. On the one hand, that is, the law produces good, in creating a certain stability in social life, as a form of protection; but on the other hand, when it is broken, it gives rise to evil. When this happens the prophet rhetorically declares what existed before the law, but did not formally become part of the law (and could not, in principle, do so), but appears when the latter is violated or rejected. Certainly it can be restored only through the power of the word, or in a form which, because of its clarity, brings about events in life which could not have occurred otherwise: neither on the basis of the law and authority, nor because of the cries of the prophets, or of holy fools, if we have in mind Russian history and express ourselves in terms of Russian stereotypes. Periodically, the latest truth on what the law does not cover and what it distorts is shouted in the face of authority and, as a result, the law often turns out to be a source of evil. The Gospel offers a different way out – to succeed through effort! That is, by means of the power exerted by the intense work of men who participate actively in society and in history.

The aims of laws are achieved, then, only by means of laws (I mean the effect of the fundamental, indivisible laws that are the basis of law in general). There is no other life worthy of the name for human beings. We must also take into account the fact that there is no alternative, because of the fundamental asymmetry of living beings: there can only be an alternative to death, not to life. Nor is there an acceptable alternative to freedom ‘which produces nothing but freedom, which does not serve any other purpose, and which does not need to be proved’ (M. K. Mamardashvili). That is because it cannot even be imagined independently of its existence, as an ideal, like numbers, for example. In this sense, freedom is not a concept at all. It is a ‘fruitful tautology of existence’, unprovable, and inexpressible without contradictions or paradoxes. European civilisation advances on the basis of this tautology along this horizon of freedom; and not simply on the basis of faith, which by definition can only be faith in the impossible: *Credo quia absurdum*. It is an absolutely literal description of the essential moving force of human consciousness, of the human soul. This is a faith in the particular historical act of divine incarnation. Only after that act have we finally known freedom.

The development of European history is dependent on its capacity for creative, constructive existence within the drama of human freedom. After all, history is a staged drama or mystery play, in the original sense of the word, in which every event is to be concentrated on a certain inner point – ‘I’ – where the sense of the wholeness of life is crystallised and resolved. Everything around us is one indivisible life. What is more, it is a life as yet un-lived, as opposed to that already lived. This is also a mystical feeling, usually expressed in the words ‘I am God’, ‘I am the Universe’ and so on. The individual is integrated into a civilisation which has inherited the spirit of the personal religion of Christianity.

On the one hand, then, there is a perception of life as a single whole, in which everything is living one life, both before and after me. It is, as it were, a single model. On the other hand, life has not yet reached its culminating point and must be lived in a worthy way. I am thoroughly involved, in a state of ‘dissolving in life’ which is characteristic of the experience of freedom, as it is at the same time an inner element of human history as drama. All accounts are settled by my standing face to face with the world. Everything is based on one authentic experience – the inner voice, the internal image of God, which has no need of intermediaries or of any external leaders or guides. This experience introduces a perspective of rationality into the way social and historical existence is in fact structured, when I demonstrate in

this way my supreme contempt for all that does not exist, as far as I am concerned: that is, the phantoms and ghosts of life and thought; all that I cannot test for myself, because of my own presence in the world and my feeling of responsibility for it.

This move towards duty and thinking based on duty does not in any way mean, however, that some kind of external guarantees have appeared. In the first place, there are no guarantees in history. In history people cannot avoid the work of freedom or the burden of self development. Second, and this is the most important thing, duty itself cannot be defined in advance and, in general, because of its nature, it is also not a concept as such. For duty is something that, if I do not do it now, will not exist and has not existed. This 'eternal' side of man is precisely what allows him, as I said at the start, to become part of a united whole, a 'tradition', as we bind history together by our thoughts and 'solutions'.

We thus find ourselves in the presence of a kind of ultimate act of comprehension, which demands a rejection not only of our usual way of solving problems, but of the very basis on which they arose. This is of course the task of philosophy. It means giving birth to something different and not merely having a new or special subject to think about. It does not leave anything behind it that can be owned or stored somewhere and then used for demonstration purposes. When thinking is reduced to the sublimation of earlier ways of thinking or becomes a compensation for cravings such as the desire for power or success, or when it turns into a means of expressing what precedes thought itself, as happened in Soviet Russia, it inevitably turns into tragedy. In other words, it leads to thought achieving aims which are not related at all to its content and which inhibit thoughtful insight. The temptation to achieve power with the aid of ideas and knowledge is something very terrible, but that it has become possible is not due to some tradition or affiliation of ideas borrowed from Plato, Marx or Machiavelli, as some intellectuals believe. On the contrary, it is the result of the shameful history of twentieth-century intellectuals themselves, with their irresponsible attitude to thought, which led at a certain point to a justification of violence which was not explicable from the point of view of traditional European cultural values. This came about because of their indifference to thought itself and their substitution of external processes that were imitations of the thinking process: anything done for the sake of compensation, self-adornment or power amounts to an imitation and distortion of the essence and function of thought.

I have already spoken of the power and function of the word, and of how it cannot be the privilege of any particular class or group of people. It is precisely this that constitutes the fantastic achievement of Christianity, which offers the opportunity to dispense with any kind of ideal hierarchy. Although hierarchy is undoubtedly present within the church as a social institution, it is not part of its teachings. In the Gospel there is no division of functions; the spiritual efforts of human beings are spoken of as a certain absolute, into which all things are gathered, when they become part of it, and on which they are based. It cannot be delegated and is beyond hierarchy, because at the point when I am a part of it, I am responsible for everything. In saying this I am referring again, in fact, to the essential nature of European culture: its dynamism and its ability to come back to life though reduced to ashes. This is the spring that keeps the European ideal moving: everything is my business! In this, the principle of rationality manifests itself. For *ratio* – a measure, a proportion – means precisely man's victory, in the spiritual struggle, over the abyss between the 'finite' and the 'infinite'.

It follows that the principle of rational thinking is linked to two important phenomena. The first is the contempt the trained soul feels for all non-existent things –

everything I am apparently supposed to accept in the world around me, but that I reject, saying 'I don't understand'. Others understand and to them it seems self-evident – but I don't understand and don't want to understand in that way. Or rather, I don't want to pretend that I understand until I understand apodictically, on the basis of the non-verbal status of my presence in the world. As a rule, such a status comes into the category of irrational obstinacy, or obscure irrationality, which has no wish to be 'enlightened'. However, in reality this is the organic root from which the seed of rationality in man begins to grow.

The second phenomenon to which the principle of rational thinking is linked is as follows. When I said that everything stands in a relationship with me I meant that nothing that exists around me is at all obvious, even on moral grounds, because within this being (myself), an event which is part of another whole being cannot appear or exist. Imagine that someone (someone's mind) is watching us and that a part of that mind, of another whole being, is acting – unknown to us – in the world of our consciousness in the form of an event of some kind. We perceive this as an event that has objectively taken place in our consciousness, although, in actual fact, it is merely an element that is part of another whole being, another person. He is, as it were, pushing something out of his world into my world or your world. It is precisely the introduction of the postulate of rationality that means the elimination or inadmissibility of the idea that my conscious world is to be organised in this way, because it follows from the postulate of rationality that my world is rational insofar as the universal in it is not part of another whole being unknown to me.

Essentially this is the position of sensible intellectuals and in general of any authentic members of civil society, even if they are not engaged in intellectual work, but simply living ordinary lives, who have normal social attitudes. It is not characteristic, however, of modern intellectuals in the traditional Russian sense of the word, who assume that educated men and revolutionary philosophers should be the ones ruling over other people. The principle of a rational attitude to life, which includes actually realising that man is the measure of all things, is categorically opposed to this. It introduces a different premise, a different dimension: that social justice is established through people's practical efforts, and that it is not attained through an ardent utopian desire to make everyone happy and wise.

The last point to which I should like to draw attention in connection with the problem of rationality is the following. It is well known that in the history of any nation, especially during periods of crisis, a great many things, if not all, are determined by human passions, which find resolution in symbols. It is also by means of symbols that those inevitable oppositions which delineate the ontology of thought are expressed. These include the opposition between the individual and society, the spirit and the body, thought and reality. None of these oppositions can in practice be resolved. They are 'aporias' – dead ends. Paradoxically, however, they still leave room for thought. The kind of oppositions which cannot be resolved through any kind of 'synthesis' or 'subtraction' can nevertheless be 'dissolved' by a living soul capable of sustaining opposing concepts. Observing such a soul is simply a way of establishing the fact that all historical events and social institutions presuppose the existence of an active soul, the presence of a living human consciousness rather than one which is dead in the 'letter of the law'.

Only an existing, living consciousness, then, can sustain the opposition between, for example, thought and reality. Thought has no power over reality. Some things can be discerned by means of thought, but it will never be the case that thought can enter into reality and create it anew, as it were. For that to happen, there would have to be

two worlds, not one. Everything outside the living soul is paradox and contradiction, logically intolerable but it can be resolved if the resolving factor is the 'bow of Heraclites' which fires the arrow of thought. For that, however, a living soul is needed – a soul already forged by the rational culture and civilisation of Christianity. Only then will superstition, fear, hatred, false mysticism, fetishism and their objects be banished from the world – especially the objects of political and social fetishism, mysticism and fear.

Divided by the course of history and standing in opposition to each other on the level of states and nations, good and evil have created an illusion of clarity in relations between East and West in the twentieth century. Identifying capitalism with evil and socialism with good and vice versa, the Soviet Union and the West for a long time relied to an equal extent on an ideology of confrontation and threat. This was carried to absurd lengths in the USSR, producing the moral chaos which we are now trying to understand. Let me cite a personal experience.

A few years ago, during *perestroika*, Stalinism was being subjected to particularly harsh criticism. Our cinemas were showing the documentary film *Stalin Is With Us*, with its clear depiction of the absurdity of a humanity turned inside out. Unlike many other critical works, this film had been made by people who met the Stalinists halfway, by trying to discover how the mass hypnosis to which they were subjected really worked.

When I saw that film I made a sincere effort to understand its central figures; like the people who made the film I was assuming that a man clearly cannot really reject himself or deny the life he himself has lived or pronounce it meaningless. But nevertheless, even though I admitted all this, I could not answer the question I considered most important: how could this have happened? As the central figures of the film – supporters of that inhuman system – asserted that they were moral people, I felt that simply saying that our life was amoral meant acquiescing in the existence of a special type of 'double' morality.

Let me repeat that I was prepared to try to understand the Stalinists by entering into their situation. But how was I to understand the phenomenon itself? We usually blame the economic state of the country, its culture and history, or, for example, the methods Stalin used in his struggle for power, his cruelty and so on. Is this correct, and if so, to what extent? Our unsatisfied longing to know the truth and 'not to live by lies' is no more than an expression of our wish for the right to be free. That is the right which the Russian people once tried to win and which, because it was handed over to the state, is still a problem today. Will discovering the whole truth free us from evil, then? After all, it is the truth about evil and violence! Will we have the courage to accept it in the name of those murdered and tortured? Will we be able to ensure that it does not arouse a new form of evil and hatred, insofar as we shall inevitably divide people into the good and the evil? What kind of guarantee do we have that we shall not resolve the situation by means of new historical trials and violence?

As a philosopher and a citizen of this country of mine, I continue to ask myself all these painful questions.

Notes and References

¹ *Perepiska G.V. Plekhanova i P.B. Aksel'roda* (Moscow, 1925), pp. 192–3.

² L. Likhodeyev, *Pole brani* (Moscow, 1990), p. 332.

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