

ANARCHISM:
THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HERMANN HESSE

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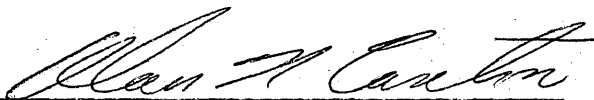
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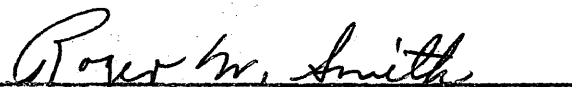
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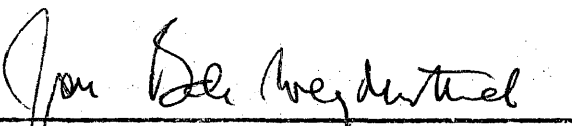
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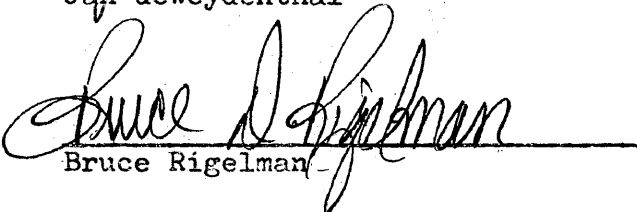

Bruce Rigelman

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the political philosophy of Hermann Hesse. It will seek to show that Hesse belongs to that unique school of political thought known as anarchism, and that through his novels and essays a distinct political prescription for the future can be delineated.

ANARCHISM:

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HERMANN HESSE

CHAPTER I
ON HERMANN HESSE

Frequently read, seldom studied, Hermann Hesse is a familiar non-person to students of political theory. While literary critics wallow in a flood of scholarly literature about Hesse and while counter-culturalists adopt him as a prophetic guru, political scholars have made no attempt to view Hesse's works as anything resembling a well thought out, definable, and prescriptive political doctrine.

Hesse's works sold more than a million copies from 1915 to 1940 and his titles are in the midst of a literary revival spawned by a new generation of readers whose appreciation and empathy for Hesse exceed that given to any other literary (or political) figure. Yet Hesse has still been neglected by political scholars, perhaps for several reasons. First of all, in 1912 Hesse chose to live permanently in Switzerland and settled in the isolated southern region of that country. As a result of this decision, Hesse was effectively removed from center stage, and was thus overshadowed by the numerous distinguished emigres who later fled to Paris, London and the United States. Another and more important factor which has caused political scientists to overlook Hesse's views is his unpolitical image. Hesse fits none of the usual political categories. He continually remained aloof from political parties or organizations of any persuasion. He belonged to neither the right nor the left; he was neither liberal nor conservative. Though devoted to the ideals of peace,

humanity, spiritual awareness, and individualism, he cannot be adequately catalogued by the standard political taxonomy. Despite his seemingly "liberal" sense of social crisis in Steppenwolf and his sensitivity to cataclysmic change in Demian, his novels, by contemporary standards, have been interpreted as being too centered on the inner development of the individual to be considered political.

It is true that Hesse wrote a number of political essays, and while they will serve as the foundation of this thesis, they had little impact during his time. Their original publication as scattered pieces, many of them in Swiss papers and several anonymously, tended to work against recognition of him as a distinctive political thinker. Only Zarathustra's Return was published in book form and although it sold well, younger activists wanted a guide to action, a framework for reform, and a dream of glory to hide the realities and consequences of the First World War. Instead, Hesse called for suffering, contemplation and introspection as a method for redevelopment. This hardly made him a hero of defeated Germany.

It was not until 1946 that Hesse collected his political essays into a volume, recently translated as If The War Goes On. The publication reveals that the political essay was not consistently employed by Hesse. One essay is dated 1914, fifteen are from 1917-1919, one each from 1921, 1937, 1940, and 1945 and five from 1946. Not only is there a major gap in his political writings during the Weimar period, but the works from 1937 on are not really essays themselves but rather talks, open letters, diary excerpts and a reply to a questionnaire. On further analysis, Hesse's so-called unpolitical image comes into sharp focus in his own emphatic statement written in the preface to If The War Goes On. In this, he considers himself thoroughly unpolitical and suggests that the

only likeness to politics his essays have is the atmosphere in which they were written. "In all other respects they are the opposite of political, because in each one of these essays I strive to guide the reader not into the world theater with its political problems but into his innermost being, before the judgment seat of his very personal conscience."¹

While Hesse does not seem to fill the traditional mold of the political intellectual, the political emigre or the political novelist, and while much has been written here, elsewhere, and by Hesse himself as to the non-political nature of his work, this thesis will argue that Hermann Hesse has a distinct place in political theory in that his works are not only similar to, but indeed are representative of that misunderstood and ill defined philosophy known as anarchism.

To understand that Hesse's works are congruous to a specific genre of political theory even though his works are not overtly political, it is necessary to understand the background that led to the formulations of his political opinions. The First World War was the great turning point in his life. Born in 1877 in Claw, Germany, Hesse was brought up in a missionary household where it was assumed that he would enter the ministry. Hesse's religious crisis led to his fleeing from the Maulbromm Seminary in 1891 and after an attempted suicide and expulsion from high school he worked in several bookshops. After two successful novels, Peter Camenzind (1904) and Beneath The Wheel (1906), Hesse's literary reputation reached great heights throughout Europe. However, the war came as a great shock and at forty years of age Hesse suffered a nervous breakdown. During this hectic period of his life he underwent Jungian psychotherapy. Losing his reading public in Germany and gaining the

¹Hermann Hesse, If The War Goes On... (New York, Noonday, 1971) p. 6.

antipathy of his literary contemporaries, he moved to Switzerland and underwent a political awakening. Of his new concern for politics Hesse wrote, "I had come to politics very late, when I was almost forty, jolted awake by the gruesome reality of the war and profoundly horrified at the ease with which my colleagues and friends had enlisted in the service of Moloch."²

Hesse was soon disillusioned by the stridently nationalistic outbursts of intellectuals in Germany. His first essay on war published in late 1914 addressed itself to his colleagues, those "neutrals," men of letters, artists, scientists, and teachers who were blinded by nationalism into betraying the ideals of peace and humanity which should be the intellectual's noblest aim. He lamented over the fact that, if the more sensitive minds of the day could be victim to war hysteria, then the "Goethean realm of the human spirit" which would be the basis of a better future, was indeed a long way off.³

For his outspoken denunciations against nationalism, retribution came quickly. The wave of criticism characterizing him as a traitorous coward severely affected him and he lapsed into political silence until 1917. The fifteen essays written during the next two years revealed a maturation in his political thinking along with the first elements of reasoning which would become the foundation of his later novels. In these essays his focus expands beyond the attitudes and behaviors of the intellectuals and encompasses the larger inhumanity of war itself. It is here that Hesse's concept of individualism starts to assert itself. He concentrates on the defense of the individual who must withstand the

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 14.

threatening pressure of a society which acts in disregard of the individual's dignity and existence.

Of particular significance for connecting Hesse with anarchism is his perception of the individual as being more important than society. Hesse borrowed equally from his own indoctrination in Christianity and his wide readings on religion. He asserts that there is only one voice of God; only one eternal truth at the heart of all the great religions and the teachings of such immortals as Goethe and Tolstoy. This is the aforementioned belief in freedom from coercion so that each individual can realize that he bears within himself the "Kingdom of Heaven."⁴ The political implications are made explicit in an essay entitled "War and Peace." Hesse denies that organizations of any form, be they governmental or private, can achieve the goal of human development to its maximum, and he outlines his own theoretical corollary to anarchist thinking, which will be detailed in another part of this thesis. Finally, it is in "Zarathustra's Return" (1919), written in a Nietzschean idiom and published anonymously, that we find Hesse's most extensive challenge to Germany (and mankind) to return to sanity. Like the Nietzschean original, this Zarathustra also repulses would-be disciples, in perhaps the same vein that the anarchist writers were repulsed by society. Hesse, like Proudhon, Stirner, and Tolstoy urged the rejection of government and collective society. Instead of conformity, Hesse insists that people follow their "destiny." Money, power, success or wisdom are only traps which are engineered by society in order for the state to perpetuate itself and prevent its inherent collapse should

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

people follow their own consciousness and achieve the "Kingdom of Heaven."

Although much has been written about Hesse's journalism, this overview would not be complete without some reference to his fiction. As noted earlier, there has been a wealth of literary criticism associated with the thirteen novels published by Hesse, however, his major commentators have merely concentrated on the usual themes of literary effect: plot, character development, symbolism, movement, the relationship of Hesse's life to his writings, along with the usual comparisons and contrasts between the novels themselves. Because an artist paints what he sees, it is not surprising to understand why few critics have bothered to explicate Hesse's political viewpoints and the social imports of his fictional work. Indeed, Hesse's novels are like icebergs in tropical waters. One is so startled to see the surface projections that he never quite gets around to examining the larger sub-surface areas. For example, since Hesse has filled his works with classical symbolism and somewhat untypical characters whose personalities are so perplexing (to say the least), we cannot blame scholars for not looking over the next hill when the grass is so lush where they are standing.

In all respects, his characters are all of the same variety. However we do not find an identification with the common man or his life style. Hesse does not write stories about people with whom the reader can easily identify. We do not find tales of ordinary men trying to cope with their ordinary problems. Indeed, Hesse deals with extraordinary members of society, those that are not only sensitive to their environments, but are even more sensitive to what they must do in order

to find contentment. All of Hesse's characters are seekers and wanderers who will try anything and indeed seek everything in human experience in order to attain an understanding of themselves and the meaning of life. With the exception of the Steppenwolf, Hesse's characters were either youths in early adolescence attempting to cope with the demands society places on them or his characters are people connected with the arts who strive to achieve contentment through their medium only to suffer disappointment when their fame or fortune is attained. But be they youths or mature adults, Hesse's personalities are remarkably the same in that they all share an anti-social, iconoclastic tendency, and experience a deep loneliness from themselves and a separation from others. There is an ever present tension and stress manifest in Hesse's characters and the release of this tension, in most cases, causes their death. While his characters search, they are all convinced that their search is probably in vain and consequently they are suicidal. This is not to say that Hesse characterizes weak people. The fact is that all of the characters reach out for life's experiences and display a courage in dealing with the insecure position of being a seeker. We see the young Siddhartha leave home to become an ascetic, never to return. Harry Haller must enter the Magic Theater. Hans Giebenrath in Beneath The Wheel, like Sinclair in Demian, must follow a different path than his friends and as a result endure the sufferings and contempt of society.

All of Hesse's characters relate to the theme of evolution from birth to adult. They must face an awakening from the myth and the polarity of the human soul.

"In the beginning was the myth" are the opening words of Hesse's first novel Peter Camenzind, which is the story of a young man who suffers the struggle, disappointments, self-deceptions and frustrations

in the literary world. He finally returns to his native village and attempts to recreate or at least understand the myth of childhood. The coming out, the realization of life and society, the awakening are all currents which run through Hesse's works. To the author, the myth is man's first answer to, and first actual visualization of, the problems of his own existence and position in the cosmos. It is man's awakening to himself and "it has all the landmarks of an awakening: the lingering on in the twilight region between night and day, the shock at the immediate directness of the new light" and the courageous attempt to find meaning and position in an unknown, frightening territory.⁵ In this way Hesse's stories are myths; his entire work is an endless recording of characters in the process of awakening. "Awakening was to me a truly magic work, demanding and pressing, consoling and promising."⁶

But after the awakening, Hesse's characters are faced with bipolarity of life; the divisions in human nature. This theme, an outgrowth of Hesse's own psychological makeup, consists of the two opposite forces the author sees as controlling the mind. These are not isolated traits as much as whole constellations of qualities or opposite galaxies containing their individual elements revolving around a fixed point, the human psyche. In one galaxy we see reason, reflection, tradition, discipline, social order, respectability, bourgeois stability and morality. Opposing this galaxy is the realm of spontaneity, emotion, intuition, instinct, and art. Nietzsche used the analogy of the gods of enlightenment and of enthusiasm and spoke of the conflict between the

⁵Oskar Seidlin, "Hermann Hesse: The Exorcism of the Demon," New Directions in Prose and Poetry, Vol. 14, 1953, p. 110.

⁶Hermann Hesse, Magister Ludi (New York, Bantam, 1970), p. 37.

Apollonian and Dionysian sides of human nature. From Sinclair's battle with the forces of light and dark in Demian to Harry Haller's struggle between bourgeois respectability and hedonistic sensuality, this theme, the conflict of reason and instinct, is repeated from story to story.

The political overtones to this conflict are obvious. Is society to organize itself around rules and standards which will foster a necessary conformity which would be overtly and covertly impressed on its members, or to the opposite extent will individual creativity, and differentiation be fostered? The concept of government and the political culture is, then, the line that is drawn between the Apollonian and Dionysian opposites. Whether we speak of collective socialism, democracy, or anarchism, we are in reality referring to where the line is to be drawn: just how far we will permit either one side or the other to dominate.

In the anarchist perspective, people are fooled when they believe that individuality, creativity, and initiative are borne out of and protected by contrived institutions such as government and law. While a measure of stability and continuity may result, such order is merely a facade behind which lies the actuality of men attempting to subjugate and destroy each other. This is the meaning Proudhon had in mind when he said that government is anarchy. What is usually called justice is merely an imitation and is held high only by those in power, those who are able to dominate or use the law for their own interests.

Anarchists insist that any authority, even a popular government, will not allow the personal freedom inherent in the Dionysian realm. The reason for this is that all authority, no matter how conceived or constituted, always remains separate and apart from the society it is to govern or protect. The state has a life of its own with goals, views

and needs particular to itself. And at the heart of authority is an inherent corruption and the seeds of repression of liberty. Those in power will wish to remain in power and will create or devise any policy so long as the internal corruption can remain hidden from the people. And the populace, being too weak to resist, meekly follows along in the vain hope that by some quirk of fate their interests will be taken care of.

Here we see Hesse's relationship to anarchism. The basic anarchist construct is a society in which all relationships will be based on social and economic equality and where people will act together through voluntary cooperation for their mutual benefit. Going back to the Greek origins of the word "anarchy," we see that it represents a condition where "no one prevails," where no person is any more powerful than another. This, of course, leads one to think that if there were no authority there would be no order and that those who were stronger in society would dominate those who were weaker and thus violence and chaos would result. Anarchists, however, maintain that individuals would be able to create and maintain a society resembling the Dionysian realm without the fear of intervention of some external authority. How this is to come about is very indefinite in anarchist literature because anarchist thinkers believe that one cannot specify with any precision what form society should take and what means of transition would be best to achieve this. It is not possible for people to be taught how to live what today is called the new life style. Instead it is necessary that people learn it for themselves. Not only is government unneeded for the transition or guidance, but as a director, government would only prevent the new order from being realized.

Much will be written later on about the idea of self will and individual liberty. An anarchist would contend that to tell a person

what he should or should not do would be to prevent his freedom and deny his liberty. Man must be free to follow his own self will. Critics, of course, say that this is not freedom but license and that license enjoyed by foolish, headstrong or immoral men can easily result in self destruction. Anarchists reply that a man must act justly, but that any limits must be self-imposed. They are convinced that any restraints imposed by an outside authority such as governmental institutions and laws will be coercive, repressive and will only result in a negation of freedom. They believe that very little of the present legal structure can ever be applied with fairness and equality because of the inherent differences in the personalities, circumstances and interests of individuals. However, there would be rules which could be universally applied because everyone would believe them, such as the Ten Commandments. But anarchists still refuse to translate these or any rules into a code of law. They steadfastly hold that most laws are used as instruments for maintaining a state structure, an economic order, and a social hierarchy which seek to undermine the very concepts which governments are constructed to protect: human justice, social tranquility, freedom, and personal growth.

While some anarchist writers have advocated violence, and others pacific means of change the one common factor present in all anarchist literature is the opposition to a "state," an "order" or a "system;" in short the Apollonian realm. The existing order is a violation of the person and spirit of man. Both by its own violations and by sustaining such institutions as private property and authoritarian churches, the state fragments the social structure and fosters a society at war with itself. All governments, according to the anarchist view, keep their citizens too repressed and impoverished, materially and spiritually, for them to realize their own human potential and social fulfillment. A

spirit of rebellion against the established order of society is the single most distinctive quality of anarchist convictions; it is one of the few that all share.

In anarchist theory the difference between any opposite ends of the political spectrum is not so much a difference in structure as it is a difference in form or style. Whether a democratic structure or an aristocratic structure is employed, it is seen that the basic life processes, wants, and needs would continue unchanged. History shows that these basic ingredients of society remain static in that without regard to the "system" used people still desire to be well fed, housed, clothed, be able to attain property, and be relatively free from coercion. In addition, people will want a degree of order and protection from chaos along with the freedom to think creatively and act on their own will. The concepts of government and social organization, then, are created to serve as a dividing line between man's instinctive side and his rational side. While this line is always drawn to favor the rational side, there is a degree of latitude in that some forms of government allow more "instinct" and some less. However, government has always favored the Apollonian to a more or less extent. Anarchists would hope to reverse this.

Hesse understands that there is no magic formula that can exact an impartial judgment between these two galaxies. Siddhartha wanders through his life looking for the perfect system; the set of values, laws, and customs which will resolve the conflict of human nature and result in contentment. What he finds is that there is no system, there is no "one way." He finds, like Knulp, Goldmund and Knecht, that all organization is coercive and only by escaping the confines of institutionalized thought, can one begin to understand the forces affecting the human

condition. Hesse is an anarchist in the purest sense. Individuality cannot exist and flourish in the organized state because the system, being a line between reason and instinct, cannot be drawn evenly. Government consistently judges in favor of the Apollonian, but as William Barrett writes, victory cannot belong to either pole. "One force cannot conquer the other without also eventually inflicting defeat upon itself. The triumph of reason and order can bring about emotional paralysis, neurosis, and the blank wasteland of Nihilism where all values lose their meaning. But pure spontaneity of emotion could turn life into a blob without form or order."⁷ Hesse, we shall see, condemns government yet he goes further in his understanding of the human psyche whether within or without a governmental organization. If Steppenwolf says nothing else about society it helps us to understand that man is condemned to live forever in the tension of the opposites; but his salvation lies in maintaining dialogue rather than conflict between them. "In the ancient Chinese symbol of psychic wholeness the dark and the light lie down beside each other and each must give to and receive from the other."⁸

⁷William Barrett, Time of Need (New York, Harper & Row, 1972), p. 191.

⁸Ibid., p. 192.

CHAPTER II

ON MAN

Hesse does not give us a particularly happy picture of society or the nature of man in his society. Hesse, who felt most at ease in the late classical period, in fact rebels at the condition that man finds himself in, for he feels that man has achieved what a hundred years before him the existentialist philosopher Kierkegaard predicted as the Age of Journalism. Hesse portrays a world of men drawn towards the goal of information as opposed to wisdom. He sees contemporary man as preferring the glossy magazine, the instant recipe, and in general, the second hand rather than the original. This we have achieved, and according to the author of Steppenwolf, the gramophone will wail on in place of the chamber orchestra's delicate intonations. This will continue until all those things that are original, wholesome, and seemingly irreplaceable will be copies or reproduced in such an inaccurate manner that what was once sacred to us will be duplicated with stereotypes.

Many political theorists have concerned themselves with the question of the relative merits of man. Is he basically a good creature corrupted by society or is he fundamentally an evil being who needs discipline and fear to keep his destructive nature from surfacing? Hesse refused to make a distinction as to whether or not man is inherently good, bad or whatever. Man is man, and that is where Hesse starts. He denies

nothing about the human being except his ability to salvage his condition using present methods of thinking. There is no "man in nature" versus "man in society" concept with Hesse because central to his political thought is the Steppenwolf, the duality of the human mind. Unlike the classical political theorists who pondered the question of man's inherent goodness or badness, Hesse only asserts that each individual is both. Man alone (such as in the mythical state of nature) can be good or bad just as he can be good or bad in society. Man cannot be either one or the other because he is a mixture of both.

Although Hesse often uses romantic settings, the author's novels do not contain romantic heroes. In addition, his characters are not readily identifiable because Hesse does not have his players strive for what western man is eternally searching for: happiness. Instead, Hesse goes beyond the maxim that man strives for happiness by asserting that the innermost drive of all individuals is peace and fulfillment. One of the best insights the reader has with respect to Hesse's "personality of man" is revealed in a speech the author gave in 1946. "From long unvisited chambers of memory there rise to our minds certain verses and maxims of wisdom, such as Goethe's observation that nothing is so hard to bear as a sequence of good days. How sad, when we long so fervently for good days. But Goethe was right: man yearns for happiness but cannot endure too much of it. So it is in the life of the individual: happiness makes him tired and lazy; after a certain time, it ceases to be happy. Happiness is a lovely flower, but it fades quickly."¹

We see from the above that Hesse is disassociating himself from that part of Freudian theory which states that the pleasure principal (id) is

¹Hesse, War, p. 144.

the drive which commands all human activity. Hesse also believes that the ego, which Freud uses to connect the superego and the id as a controlling device, is only another term for reason; and the author goes on to translate the human personality into not only a conflict between the id and ego, but between reason and the superego. The controlling device, in other words, is not always able to control. Hesse, moreover, sees the basic pleasure drive as only the surface layer of man's personality. Although all of Hesse's characters find it necessary to satisfy this principle, none of his characters are happy. Siddhartha releases himself from his ascetic vows, becomes a hedonist and finds bitterness. Harry Haller satisfies a long dormant sex urge yet is even more dejected over his condition. The idea of man satisfying his instinctual drives and becoming (or remaining) demoralized and frustrated is basic to Hesse because the author sees man striving for the wrong ends. Man is continually searching for happiness when he instead should be seeking contentment or fulfillment. Thus we see the human flaw as being a disarranged set of priorities. This, however, is not where the conflict ends. Man is caught in a battle between what he believes is right (ego or reason) and the behavior he actually exhibits due, in part, to yielding to the cultural superego. Man reasons that it is right to avoid killing, yet all too often the conflict is decided by compliance with the demands of society by allowing oneself, for example, to be conscripted to military service because this is what is expected of one by family, friends, or society generally. Contentment, then is founded in following reason or, if need be, instinct, but not the codes of hypocrisy and morality which manifest themselves as society's collective superego.

In passing, the reader may argue that this is nothing more than a battle of semantics, in that happiness and contentment are, can be, or should be equated. Hesse would agree in part. He would say that while contentment includes happiness, the opposite is not true. While he gives a Goetheian connotation to happiness, he treats contentment differently. In Klingsors Last Summer, the story of a painter full of mature wisdom and the knowledge of sadness, love and death, Hesse says of contentment: "if you have the main thing in your heart, the love, the burning, the deep emotion, then it is all the same whether you are a monk on Mount Athos, or a man of the world in Paris."²

Hesse, having been raised in a Christian home, sees the struggle between the Christ figure and the devil in man as being one and the same. Man's psyche is that of Abraxis: the embodiment of light and dark. Whereas man is usually raised to respect light or goodness and repel darkness, still man has a desire (perhaps founded on this repression) to experience the dark. When Sinclair is faced with the task of stealing money in order to pay Kroner's blackmail, although horrified at the thought of getting caught, the whole idea of doing wrong, of experiencing darkness, very much intrigues him. Hesse is saying that the only way man can free himself from the fear of evil is to commit some evil. Although this existentialist idea is not new, it completes the picture of man, as Hesse sees him: the embodiment of good and bad, light and dark. There is Harry Haller, a self-declared pacifist. However, he senses his capacity to do violence, and he constantly lives in fear of the "animal" within him. The resolution of the conflict (and the chance for inner peace) comes when Haller sees the duality between man and the

²Hermann Hesse, Klingsor's Last Summer (New York, Noonday, 1970) p. 179.

animal in himself. A trainer brings out an emaciated wolf and puts the famished animal through a circus routine. The wolf is so cowered and obedient that when a rabbit is placed in front of him he does not threaten it. Then the roles are reversed. The wolf commands the man on all fours. The rabbit again appears and the man tears it apart and eats it alive. Hesse is indeed commenting on the darkness and animal inside of man. He is saying that if this animal instinct is starved, the more ferocious will the so-called human or lightness side of us become. Harry emerges with a sincere understanding of his dark side just as Sinclair comes to understand the propensity of evil in every man. It is Hesse's view that man's personality is indeed created of light and dark and while much is made of man's apparent closeness to God's image, in reality, man has the equal and opposite drive to perform evil. All men are Steppenwolfs in that they contain the lone wolf instincts to experience the darkness. As in the case of Siddhartha, this darkness may not be so much the pursuit of violence as it is to be alone without the light or warmth of society.

The importance of Hesse's view of man's personality will further be elaborated on. Let it suffice here to say that it is not so much the knowledge "of the Lord but of the evil in man's own heart that may be the beginning of wisdom."³ Man does not live by the rational in him because only in an infinitesimal degree do men's actions spring from rational considerations. One can be thoroughly convinced that an action is absurd and still delight in it. Yet, on the other hand, the knowledge that there is wrong, evil, or darkness sets him apart. "Man is not an animal; he is not a determinable, finite entity, not a being completed

³Barrett, p. 203.

once and for all, but a coming into being, a project, a dream of the future, a yearning of nature for new forms and possibilities."⁴

⁴Hesse, War, p. 57.

CHAPTER III

ON SOCIETY

Hermann Hesse is not a social commentator in the journalistic tradition, for he did not see this as his role. In an interview he once said that his task was not to tell, but rather to show. It is interesting to note that in none of Hesse's essays does he straightforwardly describe his interpretation of the human condition. However, from the settings of his novels, the reactions of his characters to their cultural surroundings, and bits and pieces of social analysis found in his essays, Hesse makes sufficiently clear to the reader where he feels society has developed from, where it is, and where it is going.

Man had lived in a social collective, a herd, for thousands of years before the advent of either the state or continual technological innovation. And while it is an accepted tenet of modern sociology that we are herd animals, is it possible that life in the herd is in fact nothing more than an escape from ourselves as individuals? Hesse would answer in the affirmative, for it is seen that he writes about man in society with a disdain much like the currently popular future forecasters. While Alvin Toffler believes that man has not changed enough to meet the future, Hesse feels that man has for too long, attempted to escape from his Dionysian past into an Apollonian future.

As noted earlier, Hesse saw within man a conflict between the animal and the human along with the conflict between reason and reality. For psychological as well as physical reasons, man forms social

relationships with others, and in order to function in harmony with others he must repress the animal side. Why does he feel compelled to subordinate himself to society? Hesse believes that man's flaw is in trying to attain contentment by seeking what he calls ephemeral happiness. And this contentment man so fervently searches after will come from becoming one of the group, the happiness of belonging, the security of being like the others. Yet man is quite ignorant because in order to achieve what he thinks will bring happiness he has to give up his one precious gift as the price: his individuality and thus his potential for development into a better member of the species. Of course Hesse would not deny that man is a social animal. He needs friends and acquaintances as a source of stimulation and education. Yet what he really needs is not society surrounding him but rather individuals who can contribute to his own personal development. As long as man subordinates himself to society he will be forced to give up his own personal uniqueness for the stereotype of the crowd. What Hesse affirms is the supposition that the entering into society will never bring man full contentment or ever improve the human condition.

Hesse indicts bourgeois respectability or middle class morality as the catalyst for alienating man from himself. Human development, Hesse believes, is contingent upon freedom and creativity. Yet once man enters into society he is forced to conform to its rules, code of ethics and other methods of stifling his own development. This is why the extraordinary person is not only a rarity but also suspect by society, as Hesse tells us in his novel Demian. Demian tells Sinclair about a possible reinterpretation of the bible episode of Cain and Able. Cain, in the beginning had a mark, a sign, but nothing physically noticeable,

perhaps an aura or charisma. "It is much more likely that he struck people as faintly sinister, perhaps a little more intellect and boldness in his look than people were used to."¹ Obviously people were afraid of Cain and those like him and in time a myth was created about this type of man so that all who had been afraid could now get even. Cain would be considered evil instead of what he really was. This myth started with the Bible, grew into religion and finally was incorporated into what we call morality. In essence, what Hesse is telling us is that our concept of morality is indeed a socializing factor, one that takes divergent personalities and, like a medium of exchange, makes us all into replicas of a single mold. Morality is an equalizing factor which, while bringing men down to a common footing, at the same time prevents them from becoming what they might otherwise be. This alienation from self is further exemplified by Harry Haller. Here is a man who is trying to resist the constraints of what he calls bourgeois hypocrisy, but by his own admission he always lives in its houses. Harry is able to see beyond the mass's struggle for happiness, yet he is still too weak to resist. Bourgeois hypocrisy has taught Harry to believe he is one person, that he is an individual, yet he must deny his own individuality and act as a social product. The result, of course, is an individual who cannot make up his mind whether he is human or animal. The animal tells him to follow his pleasure drive, yet the so called human side asks him to comport himself in the manner that society would expect of a person of his rank and station. Morality, in Hesse's view, commits a kind of violence on most people by limiting in their eyes the true perspective of what they are and can be. Most men seem content to deny their own character, so that modern day existence is filled with only a few model

¹Hermann Hesse, Demian (New York, Bantam, 1965) p. 25.

types and many imitators. Yet those who break away, those who are able to question and who can follow their own self will become not the heroes in bourgeois society, but the villains, the Cains, the Steppenwolfs.

Hesse would agree with the French anarchist Proudhon who said "property is theft." Yet he would go farther by saying that bourgeois morality is slavery. Emma Goldman, one of the most prolific of modern anarchist thinkers, formulates a theory of social morality very close to the aforementioned theory of Hesse's. The primitive man, unable to understand his being, and having the need to rely on others for physical well-being, created a pattern of beliefs based on concepts which could not be disproved and consequently were believed by all, thus restraining conflict. Hence comes religion and from this our concept of morality. All of our ideas of morality are based on the premise that the individual is nothing, the collective or social unit is everything and nothing must be done to disturb the social unit. "The state, society and moral laws all sing the same refrain: Man can have all the glories of the earth, but he must not become conscious of himself."² Goldman goes on to state that the philosophy of anarchism is to bring to man the consciousness of himself and that the controlling forces on his personality - religion, the state, and morality must be subordinated to the need for man to be completely human. While on the surface this may seem to be rather indirect evidence proving Hesse's place among anarchist thinkers, it is asked of the reader if a better interpretation of Demian could be established? Is it not true that those with the "mark of Cain" have had to subordinate society to themselves in order to achieve their development?

²Hoffman, Robert, Anarchism (New York, Atherton Press, 1970) p. 37.

And is it not true that most people do the reverse and never realize their potential?

Max Stirner foreshadowed modern psychoanalysis by observing and denouncing the internalization of parental moral values. He found that from childhood man is consumed with moral prejudices. Morality has become "an internal force from which I cannot free myself; its despotism is ten times worse than before, because it now scolds away from within my conscience." He adds that if there were anything that ever came "from the devil" it would surely be that "false divine voice which has been interpolated into the conscience."³ The creator of a character who lives only for the luxury of committing suicide; a writer who lashes out at the hypocrisy of assigning a mark of Cain to men who see a different path; a seeker whose characters follow their (and his) own path of not just living, but rather reaching for life's meaning, for fulfillment, for purity beyond the bounds of society's accepted limits or methods seem to me to be a proponent of anarchist philosophy.

Yet if morality is a function of society which makes man a slave, then what attitude would Hesse have toward the agents of society used to enforce its moral codes? Having lived through two world wars and witnessed the rise and fall of totalitarian government along with the social repression it brought upon him and his country, it is little wonder that Hesse considered the governmental machinery as the ultimate form of tyranny. His resistance to the state, however, did not start from political doctrine but rather from educational experiences. The anarchist Stirner remarked that "the young are sent to school in herds to learn the old saws and when they know the verbiage of the old by heart they are said to

³Daniel Guerin, Anarchism From Theory to Practice (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 29.

have come of age. The real seducers and corrupters of youth are the priests and parents who muddy young hearts and stupefy young minds."⁴

Hesse, who held just such an attitude, wrote an early novel about a young man's experiences under the Gymnasium or Beneath the Wheel. The main character, Hans Giebenrath, through the pain of competition wins a place in the state academy. Although a bright young man, he is constantly pushed to excel by his parents, teachers, and the townspeople, being their pride and joy. Upon arriving at the school he meets up with a young man by the name of Heilner who was to Hans what Hermine was for Harry Haller and what Max Demian was for Sinclair. Heilner introduces Hans for the first time to the idea of curiosity beyond material found in the academician's world. He leads Hans to think for himself and to value such non-academic concepts as nature, poetry writing, and what at the time would be considered time wasting. Needless to say, Hans's grades fared poorly and when Heilner runs away from school Hans realizes that the educational system is actually an attack upon himself as a person. He sees the system as a state organized tool which fosters intellect and ambition at the expense of emotion, soul and instinct. Hans becomes very ill and is forced to drop out of school. He attempts to work as a machinist's apprentice, yet unable to fit into society and to play the role expected of him, he commits suicide. The point Hesse makes is that society considers Hans an individual failure. However, Hesse sees the institution of education as the real malefactor. He remarks of Giebenrath that it "did not occur to any of them (the professors) that a fragile creature had been reduced to this state by virtue of school and the barbaric ambition of his father and his grammar school teacher. Why

⁴Ibid., p. 29.

was he forced to work until late at night during the most sensitive and precarious period of his life? Why purposely alienated from his friends in grammar school? Why deprived of needed rest and forbidden to go fishing? Why instilled with a shabby ambition?"⁵ Hesse is asking his reader (in 1906) to consider the hypothesis that the educational system, in much the same manner as the government, is a stifling force on the development of the individual: more coercive than morality yet more covert. The state maintains an educational system so that those who are gifted with minds bent toward inquiry, will be stifled. Hesse, in effect, implies that those members of society who are curious are in effect analogous to Cain. There is fear on the part of those in control. Because of this fear, the educational system is only a process by which the individual can cleanse himself from the mark of Cain. The author, who had no university training himself, recognizes that the enlightened individual who desires to achieve his own goals without the machinery of the state is most often doomed to rejection. While this rejection is not necessarily regretful, since it may provide a stimulus for the gifted person to follow what Hesse calls self-will (see Chapter IV), it is evident from Beneath the Wheel that most individuals cannot help but be beaten or corrupted by the system if they choose to fight it. The state does not provide for an environment where learning will be consumed, but instead it perpetuates a system for control over the individual. "I knew it was our teacher's duty to crush us as much as possible; they demanded virtues which they themselves did not possess, the history they set before us was a goal devised by grownups in order to belittle us and keep us in our places."⁶

⁵Hermann Hesse, Beneath the Wheel (New York, Bantam, 1968) p. 139.

⁶Hesse, War, p. 62.

As for that other tool of the system, the government, Hesse, in the collection of essays, attacks the notion of government because it is the vehicle which is the greatest hypocrisy in that it creates violence in the guise of protection. Hesse, like Tolstoy, lashes out against the idea of allegiance to something other than oneself. Tolstoy believed that nationalism in reality meant a very definite feeling of preference for one's own people or state above all other peoples and states. In line with this is the desire to obtain for one's own state the greatest advantages, powers, or benefits that can be taken at the expense, of course, of the advantages, powers, or benefits of other peoples or states. Hesse agrees with Tolstoy and sees nationalism as the primary cause of war in the modern world. He argues throughout his book of anti-war essays that through improved communications and the unity of industry, of trade, of the arts, and science that men being so culturally and economically bound should realize that conquest of or by a neighboring people would be mutually unbeneficial. One would think, according to Hesse, that nationalism would subside, yet the reverse is true. He says "most men are dependent on four things which they desire too greatly: long life, fame, title and rank, money and possessions. It is their unrelenting desire for these four things that makes men fear demons and fear one another. Every state is built upon this fourfold fear and dependency."⁷ Nationalism, then, serves as the rationalization which people use to sympathize with governments in their attacks on other nations, in seizures of foreign possessions and in defending what has already been taken. This occurs because those in power have the tools of influencing the people to support those activities on the part of the

⁷Ibid., p. 130.

government which increases either the wealth or power of the rulers. Tolstoy remarks that the ruling class has the army, the schools, the churches, the press, the bureaucracy, and the wealth in their hands. They kindle patriotism through the history lesson, the political speech, and the editorial until love of one state becomes hate toward any other. The consequence is war. Hesse concurs with Tolstoy. He states that, while only a very few "morbid fanatics" are in favor of the war, it still continues. "This is possible only because we are all too lazy, too cowardly. It is possible only because somewhere in our secret hearts we approve or tolerate the war, because we throw all the resources of our minds and souls to the winds and let the misguided machines roll on."⁸ Hesse indicts government for his hypocrisy. To paraphrase his argument, governments, in order to exist, must defend their people from other people's attack. Yet it is evident that people (with a few exceptions) do not wish to attack or be attacked. And therefore governments, far from working for peace, carefully excite the anger of other nations against themselves. After having excited animosity, government then stirs up the nationalistic spirit and assures the people they are in danger and must be defended.

Yet Hesse does not vent his full wrath on bourgeois democracy as on its politicians. Government officials, Hesse feels are only representative of those that elect them, and like Burke, Hesse would hope they would have more sense than their electors. In an essay entitled "To a Cabinet Minister," he comments on a speech made by a government official in 1917. He chastises politicians for their hypocrisy in paying public homage and honor to the platitudes of love and peace,

⁸Ibid., p. 36.

but, like the populace at large, they believe and act otherwise. Hesse cries out against those who are educated and intellectually responsible, for they should understand the needs of mankind. He says to the minister, "your speech shows a profound feeling of concern and responsibility for your people, its army, and its honor. But it shows no feeling for mankind."⁹ Politicians, Hesse goes on to state, cannot possibly realize the damage they do, and as a consequence cannot bring peace because besides being slaves to nationalism, politicians are culturally deficient. They are solely concerned with power, riches, title, and honor; the four dependents. Their fear of being wrong, while understandable, as is Harry's fear of jazz, is nevertheless an unpardonable sin when the amount of human suffering is taken into account. Hesse accuses government officials of escaping from human reality and says this is a result of a lack of understanding of the real truths as written by such "immortals" as Jesus, Goethe, or Lao-Tzu. Politicians, he says, cannot make decisions based on human needs and understanding because they do not have an understanding of reality. He remarks that the minister who cannot make a decision to end the war is not only blinded by his patriotism but also because he hears "too little music and reads the great authors too little. For many years, Herr Minister, your eyes and ears have been attuned to theoretical aims rather than reality; they have long been accustomed to close themselves to much of what constitutes reality, to disregard it, to deny its existence."¹⁰ Hesse cries to the politicians to forget about such meaningless issues such as tonnages, alliances, loans, and troop levies, and to instead

⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

open their eyes to what he sees as the real needs, the end of war, misery, alienation; i.e., the messages of the "immortal" writers, poets, and artists. This is reality to Hesse and he admonishes state officials for hiding from it. If we must have a state then it should be run by enlightened men capable of translating the age old message of the immortals (as Hesse calls them) into the present. If only those in power could see what they really accomplish, the violence they bring on themselves and commit on others; if only they could open their eyes to "true reality, they would hear the voice of mankind, they would shut themselves up in their room and weep."¹¹

Yet it was not bourgeois democracy that Hesse really villified as much as he did authoritarian socialism. Although Hesse did have a small admiration for communist activists, in their sincerity and commitment to their cause, he rejected socialism on the grounds that it is capable of producing the strictist regimentation and repression. Just as Proudhon was dissatisfied with any system which starts from the principle that the "individual is entirely subordinate to the collectivity,"¹² so Hesse detested authoritarian socialism because it led to a negation of liberty, and without individual freedom, Hesse implies, all human activity concerned with creativity would be impossible to accomplish.

The most revealing of Hesse's essays, with the exception of "Zarathustra," is a short piece written in 1917 entitled "If The War Goes On Another Two Years." Written as a story, it concerns the

¹¹Ibid., p. 18.

¹²Guerin, p. 21.

author who is magically able to transform himself two years into the future, only to find that social authoritarianism has taken the last vestiges of freedom and individuality away from the citizenry. Because he did not have a walking permit he was arrested, fined, and since he had no money he was ordered to surrender his existence card. Not having one of course, he is herded from one place of detention to another. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation he simply asks to be "killed."

"Couldn't you condemn me to death? I should be very grateful!"

The official looked gently into my eyes.

"I understand," he said amiably. "But anybody could come asking for that! In any case, you'd need a demise card. Can you afford one? They cost four thousand gulden."

"No, I haven't got that much money. But I'd give all I have. I have an enormous desire to die."

He smiled strangely.

"I can believe that, you're not the only one. But dying isn't so simple. You belong to the state, my dear man, you are obligated to the state body and soul. You must know that."¹³

Certain questions arise. What sort of creativity can be accomplished in the authoritarian social state? Besides the debatable merits of economic equality, what can communism offer the individual? Hesse answers his own question by saying that communism does not think of the man behind the worker. The system usurps the most important part of human existence: the opportunity for man to enjoy himself as an individual after he has fulfilled his task as a producer. In a "Dream After Work" Hesse outlines his concept of individual freedom in what would be the most important part of life: the act of discovery and dreams.

¹³Hesse, War, p. 25.

Everything I was carrying in my briefcase and in my head was forgotten, and for a quarter of an hour, while my walk lasted, I lived not in what we call 'reality' but in the beautiful authentic reality we bear within us. I did what children and lovers and poets do. I forgot all will and purpose and let myself drift in pursuit of lovely, colorful dreams....

... For a long time I peered at the distant mountains and the smoky golden-brown clouds, and mixed ultramarine into the red, holding my breath in caution because the scene had to be so infinitely delicate and light and airy. After a moment's hesitation my brush with swift circular strokes, painted a luminous cloud into the blue, with gray and violet shadows. Everything the world had to say and do to me, to confess to me and ask my forgiveness for - and I to the world - lay there ardent and still in the white and blue, in the bold joyful yellow and the sweet serene green. And I felt that this was life! This was my share in the world, my joy and my burden. Here I was at home. Here there was pleasure in store for me, here I was king, here I could turn my back with blissful indifference on the whole official world.¹⁴

We see then that bourgeois democracy is not a fit form of government because the people are misled and involved in activities against their own interests by narrow minded, short sighted officials who hypocritically rule in the people's name. On the other hand, authoritarian socialism commits the crime of disallowing the individual his development as a human being beyond the provider stage.

How then does Hesse view modern society as a total system? For this we must turn to Hesse's last major work, the book that won for him the Nobel Prize in 1946, Magister Ludi. He writes about a world of the future that looks back upon our civilization with contempt and pity. The collapse of our world comes about not through war, but through boredom and emptiness. Man unable to cope with his own

¹⁴Ibid., p. 55.

personality and unwilling to solve the problems of technology and social institutions, evolves into an almost machine-like, unemotional, passive, staid shell. Our society, he says, stereotyped and stifled human development so that we, in time, ceased to be human. Man's social institutions became such a tyranny of the spirit that man ceased to involve himself in his own destiny. "They (we of the present) who read so many books and listened to so many lectures, could not fortify themselves against their stark fear, to struggle against their inherent dread of death, and lived in trembling, believing in no tomorrow."¹⁵

The total society, in effect, kills man. In an essay entitled "Thou Shalt Not Kill," he points out how our institutions commit violence on us. It kills us by driving gifted young people into occupations for which they are not suited. Governments turn us away from the problem of poverty and affliction through its fear of attack. Society makes it easier to approve of what Hesse calls "atrophied social, political and educational institutions," instead of resolutely fighting them.¹⁶ As Robert Hoffman sees the situation, the state no matter how constructed, is a form alien from the society it governs. It is not the embodiment of the citizenry but rather an institution with needs, views, and goals of its own. Instead of responding to the needs and desires of society, the state has its own existence, and serves society as it sees fit. The state imposes its will on a largely

¹⁵Hesse, Magister Ludi, p. 131.

¹⁶Hesse, War, p. 126.

helpless population, and is victorious over it by means of coercion.¹⁷

Then it is asked, what will man become? A mechanical society of Orwellians? Not at all. Hesse predicts in Magister Ludi that we will lapse into the monastic contemplativeness of the Middle Ages. We will become a Castalia, a society devoted to the Glass Bead Game, a sort of mathematical competition involving symbols, music, and prismatic patterns. In Castalia the reality of time is changed. The Castalian society is really a surrealistic, continuous, unchanging present. It is a static, sterile, rigid society with no room or desire for change from within or without. It is not so frightening as it is boring. It is a place populated by Steppenwolfs, without the possibility of a Magic Theater. It is Hans Giebenrath's academy; intellect without emotion. Castalia is, in totality, a pessimistic projection of what Hesse believes could be the ultimate violence on the human condition.

Like the anarchist that he is, Hesse is crying out to us. We've gone on this way for so long. See what we have. There must be a better way.

Hesse believes that there is, but like the Magic Theatre, the price of admission is the mind.

¹⁷Hoffman, p. 13.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY

The Hesseian Viewpoint

Toward the end of his life Siddhartha meets his friend from his youth, Govinda, who has never ceased to struggle tensely for Nirvana. He asks Siddhartha for instruction and he is told: "I can love a stone, Govinda, and a tree or a piece of bark. These are things and one can love things. But one cannot love words. Perhaps that is what prevents you from finding peace, perhaps there are too many words, for salvation and virtue. Samsara and Nirvana are only words, Govinda."¹

What the reader should not expect from Hesse is some new hitherto unthought of or unique formula for solving the problems of society and the inadequacies of ourselves. There are no real panaceas, holy grails, or magical salvations except for those we create in our minds. Once communicated, however, they become, to the non-creator, only words. This student asks his reader to look beyond the words on the page, to investigate the idea behind the words and to arrive at a meaning which, as a product of the mind, makes communication by the written word difficult.

Those well versed in the language of politics will, in dealing with Hesse, be on unfamiliar ground in that they will be expecting political solutions to what could generally be termed political problems. Even with respect to the genre of anarchist literature, Hermann Hesse's

¹Hermann Hess, Siddhartha (New York, Bantam, 1971) p. 142.

solutions might be viewed with suspicion and disbelief by even the most confirmed anarchist theorist. In order for one's mind to be conditioned to Hesse's philosophy it might be helpful to ask if the only answers to political problems must be borne out of politics itself. It seems almost absurd to believe that even more of what ails us, will indeed, help us. Does it make any sense to believe that greater fascination for, or a different configuration of, politics will lead us out of those problems which are political in nature. The answer, of course, is yes, it makes sense. For even after five thousand years of recorded history, we are still looking for the solution from within the problem. We use politics to cure politics. While the logic of this method might be sound, we have to ask ourselves if the method itself is just as sound. Perhaps we are too caught up in our process of logic to pay attention to the product of our logic. It might be that the logical validity of social solutions, the process of model derivation holds more interest for us than the model itself. For instance, the great amount of money and manpower programmed to produce so called solutions to our social problems have always been greater than the results of these models. We spend so many dollars and man hours in research, in meetings, in logical model building that the finished product, be it a social agency, or volunteer group patterned after some inalienable, unalterable, or so called universal maxim of politics, invariably either fails outrightly, or consumes so much in the way of resources for its own self perpetuation that the problem that this model was derived to solve, is given only cursory attention when compared to the time and resources spent in setting up the "solution." If our Great Society and its experiment in liberalism has taught us anything, perhaps it is that we must go outside the

traditional modes of approaching problems. What might logically constitute a valid solution, in practice either fails, or worse, adds to the burden of social competition for attention and resources. As the anarchists would ask, can we expect even more government to solve the already existent excesses of government? While in a logical manner we could argue in favor of this, it seems that recent history tells us the opposite; that we must look toward other avenues of escape.

The reader might ask, what other avenue, then, can we look to? What is unfortunate about the question is that the answer will (and has) in all probability be dismissed as nothing more than a metaphysical, mystical or other worldly abstraction, just as incapable of being put into practice as our usual procedural methods. This is the most important reason that Hesse has been overlooked as a social theorist.

As a writer Hesse is neither a story teller nor a didactic essayist in the contemporary style. In essence he is between these two poles. While he wrote with plots and characters and commented on events of the day, his works are in an almost timeless language. The difficulty most readers have with Hesse is that he expresses ideas so basic to humanity as to be unconcerned with the cognitive domain of knowledge. He believed that the true profession of man is to find his way to himself and for Hesse the search for this way became a metaphysical search, associated with, and intensified by Oriental philosophy. The wisdom, not platitudes, of the East were to broaden and strengthen the potential for self-realization, the just society, and the contented life for the citizens of what he saw was a declining western civilization. While this brings him close to Thoreau, like the transcendentalists before him, Hesse's philosophy designated him as the "poet of

metaphysical twilight, Rembrandt of the world,"² and as a defendant to the "charge of perpetuating a form of Romanticism."³

Daniel Guerin, one of the most noted students of anarchist thought, says that anarchism can be described first and foremost as a visceral revolt. What he means is that the anarchist, while being a man in revolt, is not rebelling against any particular policy, platitude, or institution. To the contrary, he rejects society as a whole along with its guardians. The bad as well as the good is dismissed by the anarchist thinker and as Max Stirner puts it, he must free himself from all that is sacred and carry out a "vast operation of deconsecration." He admits that anarchists are not and probably will not for some time to come ever be taken seriously and in the meantime are considered "vagabonds of the intellect and bad characters." However, it will continue to be the trade mark of an anarchist to "refuse to treat as intangible truths things that give respite and consolation to thousands and instead leap over the barriers of tradition to indulge without restraints the fantasies of their impudent critique."⁴ This permanent state of revolt makes the anarchists sympathetic to non-conformists, to what might be called outlandish thinking, and while they disagree among themselves, they are also completely misunderstood or not understood by the public at large.

And so it is with Hesse as with any other anarchist. He has not been understood or taken seriously. Understandably, his themes as well

²G. E. Mueller, "Hermann Hesse," Books Abroad, XXI (1947) p. 146.

³Stanley Townsend, "The German Humanist: Hermann Hesse," Modern Language Forum, XXXII (1947) p. 1-12.

⁴Guerin, p. 13-14.

as the "melancholy, mandarin quality of the heroes were not to the taste of American readers of the Lazy Age, the Great Depression, and the war years."⁵ Time magazine once termed Hesse as "relentless esoteric - one of those Faustian fellows who make Moholes out of mole holes."

Surveying the wreckage, confusion and complete hopelessness of the German situation in 1919, Hermann Hesse, outraged at what devastation and despair society was able to accomplish on itself, turned to Nietzsche who he considered as the embodiment of the true German spirit and courage separate and apart from the herds of mass enthusiasm. He wished to turn the German intellectual community away from the haranguing of demagogic politicians, social reformers, and their cries of return to former pre-war times. He turned toward Nietzsche as a man able to follow his own calling, who amid the middle class conformity of his time and the industrial boom, became an anti-patriot and anti-German. Hesse believed that the German mind had degenerated before the war and he felt that if a new society was to arise from the ashes of a defeated Germany, a society which can secure contentment and fulfillment for everyone, then, "we must not begin at the tail end, with political methods and forms of government, but at the beginning, with the building of the personality."⁶

The prescription for the refounding of society is the message of a long essay known as "Zarathustra's Return." Written in the Nietzschean idiom, this incredible essay centers around the return of Zarathustra, the German conscience. His words to his followers lay down a foundation for what Hesse sees as the only method for creating the good society.

⁵Eugene Timpe, "Hermann Hesse in the United States," Symposium, (Spring 1969) p. 75.

⁶Hesse, War, p. 87.

Like Hesse's own experience, Zarathustra is mocked by the young men, when he admits that he cannot teach them industry, or solve the problem of hunger. These are not Hesse's concerns. And like this student, Hesse (as Zarathustra) cautions his listeners not to look for wisdom, acts, formulas, or "Pied Piper's sticks in his words." What Hesse has to say is so basic that from the perspective of contemporary political analysis it seems to be almost absurd. Yet Hesse points out that his ideas have never, on a grand scale, been tried and tested. To those who look toward fashionable solutions to society, Hesse must feel as did early Christians in pagan Rome. "From a stone you can learn what hardness is, from a bird what it is to sing. And from me you can learn what men and destiny are."⁷

On Destiny

Hesse's concept of destiny, while being close to the common understanding, does not carry the historical connotation of predestination, fate or the wave of the future. For Hesse, destiny does not mean the spreading of a culture, the conquest of territory, or the eventual rise (or fall) of a particular state. Destiny also should not be confused with history. While these terms have often been used to describe destiny, the author says that they are mere idols that people hold in place of what he sees as the real destiny. "Learn that destiny does not come from idols, that at last you will know that there are no idols or gods."⁸ Destiny transcends the day to day or year to year existence of a people because it is much more than the convenient term that the state can use in its control over the people. To Hesse, destiny is an awareness, or

⁷Ibid., p. 92.

⁸Ibid., p. 93.

understanding of the highest ideals of man, his reason, his creativity, his capacity for love of self as well as fellow man. Destiny is that innate goodness that each man knows he is capable of achieving. Destiny, in its pure form is the true goodness in man's heart, the spirit of brotherhood, the ideal of kindness, sharing, and empathy all men deep within them hold. Destiny then is really the essence of what man is on earth to practice openly. While it may result in an eternal struggle, still in all, Hesse reminds us that there is only one destiny: to become human. Hesse implores his defeated nation to recognize that now is the time for them to realize their destiny. Few men, he says, have ever known their destiny, for it has been hidden from them by the state, by nationalism, and by economics.

Hesse, who has a strong shame over the history of man believes that man's destiny has always been with him, yet all of history's misery, pain and suffering are attempts to change this destiny. He says that it is, in the long run, impossible for man to accomplish this change. Optimistically he notes that once men are able to understand their real destiny, they will never try to change it. Because this awareness of himself will not yield material benefits or ego satisfying roles such as power, glory, or martyrdom, real destiny is easily repressed into the inner reaches of the mind and hidden by egotistic and sensual needs. "The endeavor to change destiny is a childish pursuit that makes men quarrel and kill one another. Your emperors and generals tried to change destiny..... But every true act, everything that is good and joyful and fruitful on earth is... destiny that has become self."⁹

⁹Ibid., p. 94.

Hesse admonishes man for being too occupied with material concerns and not recognizing his destiny. He talks about how a people become rich materially and yet remain unsatisfied. Their unhappiness and lack of contentment forces them to do violence, to conquer, and to colonize in the vain hope that more riches will divert them from their discontent. He goes on to remark that at present the people of the world, misled by governments, having not gained what they were after materially, continue to mourn their condition and to look for the "wicked enemy" responsible for their pain and suffering. Hesse says man foolishly believes that an increase in what inherently causes pain and suffering will somehow be capable of solving it. Zarathustra says to his followers that the people receive what they deserve and that they foolishly blame the state for not responding to the situation. Yet they should realize that even though government causes pain, it does not itself have any pain: it does not feel, and as such it has no empathy for the people. He says that people vent their frustrations on an institution unable to help them realize their destiny. "But why, if you are in pain, must you go on talking about nation and fatherland, about all those great and estimable things which are so easy to talk about but which so easily vanish into thin air?"¹⁰

Hesse, then says that while government is the eternal manifestation of suffering, in reality man must take the blame for thinking that government could achieve his true destiny. The poor state of the human condition is caused not only by government's actions but in the long run by man's belief that he could change destiny yet not even recognize what destiny really is. Hesse cries out for people to stop blaming foreign enemies or governments, but to blame themselves for their own ignorance.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 95.

Perhaps through an understanding that government and institutions are only manifestations of man's mistaken identification of his destiny will the condition of man improve. When men realize that they are responsible for their own pain, that it is caused by their own failures to recognize their destiny from their egotistic ideas of grandeur, riches, and power; then and only then will men begin to undo the web of constraints which have locked them into a seemingly eternal state of suffering.

Zarathustra tells his young charges that they have been soldiers, heroes and "pillars of the fatherland" yet their condition is desperate. He urges them to forget about finding or perfecting the fatherland but to "learn more and strive higher."

Action, Suffering and Solitude

It is not difficult to agree with Hesse as to what destiny is and to understand his argument for recognizing and not hiding from it. But it is then asked, how is destiny to be realized? Hesse's answer is that only through what he calls suffering and solitude can man realize his true potential, his capacity for love, kindness and goodness: destiny.

In the first place, Hesse draws a distinction between common action and what he calls "true" action. When Zarathustra's listeners ask what is to be done, the sage answers that their "doing" is the opposite of what he calls "doing." A true action, he states is not at all the same as just "doing" something in that a true action cannot be contrived or thought out. Hesse explains that throughout history men are taught in deplorable schools, and socialized in the concept of what he calls "antithesis." These opposites, in time become maxims of life and are never questioned. For example, the antithesis between man and God: that man cannot be a god and vice versa. Action and suffering is

another set of opposites, yet Hesse staunchly believes that they are one together; for together they make up our whole life. Man suffers in birth, in growing and in life until he suffers death. Hesse, of course, does not mean the suffering of physical pain nor does he use the word in its usual context. The kind of suffering that a person goes through when he is searching for an answer, and the frustrations felt during the creation of something new is what Hesse is talking about. The mental anguish of living by one's own standards as opposed to the herd is also suffering. Loving while others are hating and healing while they are killing is suffering. Suffering in this context is a daily experience for the kind of person that Hesse desires us to be. Yet this seemingly pessimistic picture is brightened by his statement that "all the good in a man, for which he is praised or loved, is merely good suffering, the right kind, the living kind of suffering, a suffering to the full."¹¹ Suffering, as Hesse outlines it, is a form of true action and one which will help lead man to his destiny.

Yet what most men call action, the building of factories, the establishment of governments, is in reality a "running away from pain, a flight from suffering." Hesse believes that in the beginning man could not reconcile the lonely voice of destiny within him because of the drives of the id for riches and self gratification. Therefore he established society. Since it was painful to hear the voice which demanded that he seek destiny, man ran away and "made noise with hammers and machines until the voices receded and fell silent." Man did not want to suffer, but only to act. This running away, having gone on for generations, is responsible for the present state of affairs. Hesse sees

¹¹Ibid., p. 98.

it necessary for man to stop his activity and to "hear, to breathe, to drink the milk of life and the light of heaven."¹² Man long ago realized the futility of his action but instead of turning toward a different direction he only multiplied his activity and in so doing made conquests, created enemies, and went to war until the hardships endured in the present (after World War I) seem unendurable. Hesse asks, are things any better? Then why, he continues, are we "Clamoring for more action, rushing into the streets, storming and shouting, electing councils, and loading guns again?" The safe answers: "Because you are forever in flight from suffering and in flight from yourselves, from your soul."¹³

When it is asked whether or not the hardships of war are suffering, Hesse agrees, but sees this as suffering that man brings on himself by being obstinate in trying to change destiny. While he admits that suffering is hard, it is the true action of destiny. The efforts to construct a society through governments, contrived laws, and institutions are only attempts to recede from the inner voice of humanity. These actions are only rationalizations of the id and pleasure principle. We fool ourselves to think that we can set up institutions which will act as our ego, which will allow us to kill, hate, plunder, and conquer, and yet at the same time give us the notion of security in that this is the only way for man, that this is the highest development of the species. No, Hesse says, we must face ourselves, we must suffer, we must achieve our real destiny. We must not be cowards. Man must

¹²Ibid., p. 100.

¹³Ibid., p. 100.

realize that government and society are the catalysts for deception. Rather than turning toward society or government, men must instead turn inward and find their true selves instead of hiding from themselves.

What Hesse means by suffering can only be understood when his concept of solitude is investigated. The author does not see the hardships of war, poverty, or affliction as real suffering because these are only foredoomed attempts to change destiny by fleeing from the suffering man fears most: solitude. This idea of solitude, says Hesse, is the road over which man can be led to himself, the prerequisite of his achieving destiny.

What seems so easy, Hesse says, is in fact the most fearful of endeavors. The example he gives is that of the men in history who have "walked alone," yet by their peers were considered to have been insane or evil. Solitude is indeed heroism, yet man considers heroism in the genre of what Hesse calls the work of criminals. Society idolizes the physically strong and those who can out-perform others. Men everywhere look up in admiration to those who most nearly approach the ideal of themselves, who approximate the violent or carnal aspirations of the masses. Yet the poet, the dreamer, the seeker, while tolerated, is considered as a mutant variety of the human form. They, who most approach the ideal human values, are looked down upon and cast aside as, at most, unvaluable members of the species. Hesse uses himself, the poet, as an example. He talks about the years he has spent working on and revising an eight line poem. In the eyes of the world this endeavor is considered an absurdity, a ludicrous and insane act. Hesse asks why does a poet spend so much effort over a few lines? There could be two answers. First, while the effort might be wasted in that the

probability is slight that the poem will outlive the author or his time, he has still done something "better, more desirable, and less harmful than most people." Because it is only a poem, the people hold him in little respect because he did not shoot a gun, set off a bomb or make a bullet. This too might be an answer. The poet, in selecting words and writing them down in and for a world which might be destroyed tomorrow is paralleling nature's forces. The flowers, plants, and animals which live and grow in a valley which tomorrow might be devastated by war's carnage do not let on to such probabilities. It is eternal optimism that the poet gives. These may be answers as to why a poet would spend so much time on a seemingly unproductive piece of work. Only the artist and poet are able to perceive the directions that society flows toward and it is they who ask the basic questions of why men think one way as opposed to another. Most members of society are too involved with solidifying their membership in the system to ask whether or not one's membership is desirable. But Hesse cries out, "except for the poet himself, no one asks the question."¹⁴ Men who question are men who suffer solitude. The poet is the real purveyor of destiny, the real hero, yet people do not read poetry as they would fire a gun, for they think it best to discourage themselves from the suffering of solitude: the poets' world.

While solitude is a fearful entity it is also a difficult one to achieve once entered into. Since man, from childhood is raised as a social animal, the ties to society are difficult to sever. Even the hermit and recluse have psychological ties to family and friends. Because of this, most men have never tasted solitude. Man fears being alone more than any other kind of suffering, yet Hesse says, it is

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 136-137.

just this sort of activity that man needs. When a solitary man walks among the masses he is hated and feared and treated as an outcast. The poet, the artist, the thinker who approximates the man of solitude in society is in reality the real hero, the man of true action, the mind capable of suffering, solitude, and destiny. They are able to do what most men fear: they face the possibility of falling. In one succinct paragraph Hesse outlines the tasks of solitude. Zarathustra tells his disciples that

...it is hard my dear friends, to live without a mother, it is hard to live without home and people, without fatherland or fame, without the pleasure of life in a community. It is hard to live in the cold, and most of those who have started on the path have fallen. A man must be indifferent to the possibility of falling, if he wants to taste of solitude and to face up to his own destiny. It is easier and sweeter to walk with a people, with a multitude even through misery. It is easier and more comforting to devote oneself to the tasks of the day, the tasks meted out by the collectivity. See how happy the people are in their crowded streets! Shots are being fired, their lives are in danger, yet every one of them would far rather die with the masses than walk alone in the cold outer night.¹⁵

Like Siddhartha, man must stop seeking solutions from society and start seeking solutions from within himself. The method is solitude, the process of introspection and retrospection, the role playing of the poet. We must ask the question the poet asks, what is man? While some go out into the country and live the life of the herd in an idyllic setting, it is those who stand in the thick of the crowd but who separate themselves from it that are the knowers of solitude and self-will.

Self-Will

At this point the reader is probably asking what if anything does the foregoing have to do with politics. The answer to this becomes

¹⁵Ibid., p. 104.

evident when the anarchist concepts are compared to Hesse's concept of self-will.

All of those virtues that man has learned from society, honesty, thrift, valor, etc., can be compiled under the heading of obedience. Yet self-will is also a form of obedience. Hesse raises the question, then of: when is man to obey society if confronted with the idea of self-will? The difference between societal values and self-will is that the virtues deemed so important in our society are in reality obedience to man made laws. Self-will, on the other hand, is the only virtue Hesse sees as being independent and insubordinate to these laws, for a self-willed man hears a different voice and obeys a different law: "the law in himself, his own will."

Self-will is a much misunderstood concept, and as such men hold it in low esteem by giving this virtue a less fearful name: character, personality, or originality. Self-will is termed "originality" in art and while held as a good thing, it is seen as the trait of only a few tolerated eccentrics. "Character" or "personality" also are wrongly termed as being self-will. A man, says Hesse, is considered to have "character" when he has a few notions and opinions of his own but does not live by them. However, a man with self-will is one who not only has thought out his own ideals but indeed lives with and by them.

When all the entities of nature are considered, man is the only one that must obey, not the "law of life and growth" but other laws that are enacted by men and alternatively changed by men. This is government. This is the institution which seeks to abolish man's self-will. What our author finds strange about this arrangement is that those few beings who during their lifetime have decided to disregard arbitrary law in

order to follow their own will have come to be revered as heroes. Even though they were persecuted in their own times, even though their views or actions aroused hatred and antagonism, men such as Socrates and Jesus were sanctified by later generations. "The same mankind which praises obedience to its arbitrary laws as the supreme virtues of the living reserves its eternal pantheon for those who have defied those laws and preferred to die rather than betray their self-will."¹⁶

Suffering, then, comes from solitude and from solitude comes this concept of self-will. Hesse says that it is a prerequisite that the masses, whom he holds in low regard because of their fear of solitude, should listen to the man of solitude, the self-willed man. Throughout history, Hesse says, the quiet self-willed man, usually tragic hero, who has gained insight into his inner being has shown mankind that disobedience to the state, the laws of man, is not a "gross irresponsibility" but an allegiance to a higher more important law. These are the real heroes of the earth, not those who allow themselves the convenience and security of imitating the herd. The obedient well-behaved citizen, the soldier following orders, or the mob, are not heroes because only the person who has, through suffering and solitude, learned his self-will is capable of accomplishing man's destiny.

It is with ringing clarity that Hesse joins in harmony with the anarchist viewpoint. When told that a world consisting of men possessing courage and self-will would be "topsy turvey" he replies that "in reality, life would be richer and better if each man independently followed his own law and will. In such a world, it is true, some of the insults and unreflecting blows that keep our venerable judges so

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.



busy today might go unpunished. Now and then a murderer might go free.... On the other hand, many of the terrible, unspeakably sad and insane things that we witness today in our so well ordered world would be unknown and impossible. Such as war between nations."¹⁷ Hesse is not in any way promising a panacea or a utopia. Like the anarchist, Hesse is saying that a different approach is necessary to bring about improvement and his prescription is this concept of suffering, solitude and self-will.

This prescription sounds to the reader very metaphysical and completely impractical. It is evident that achieving self-will is one endeavor, but translating this into some form of political betterment is quite another. While some anarchists have preached revolution to do away with the state, Hesse advocates what would be called an evolution. Revolution, he says, is war and like war it is a "prolongation of politics by other means." Men, however who have achieved a state of self-will, will have no interest in politics "whether it is monarchist or democratic, revolutionary or conservative." Men endowed with self-will, will not seek money or power and will in fact despise them, not out of any sense of altruism but because money, power and possessions for which men covet and abuse each other, will have little value to the men of self-will. These men will desire those things which will help them to live, to grow, to create. This cannot be accomplished or aided by money or power because these entities are inventions of distrust men have for one another. The trusting society of self-willed men who know their destiny will not be driven to compensate their present distrustfulness through such substitutes as money. And as such a society grows,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 82.

the need for government and state institutions will become less and less until there will be no need for any controls over the wills of men.

"When a man has confidence in himself, when all he wants in the world is to live out his destiny in freedom and purity, he comes to regard all those vastly over-estimated possessions as mere accessories ...never essential."¹⁸

Once self-will is achieved, Hesse says, all of the most highly commended virtues become questionable. He gives the example of patriotism which earlier was held to be the foundation of the state's control. Man is accustomed to believe that he cannot be well off unless someone else is worse off; we seek profit at the cost of others and it is the state that is the instrument of this distrust. Yet the self-willed society would have no need for patriotism because there would be no necessity (or possibility) for a state to exist without distrust among men. "The destiny of the self-willed man can be neither capitalism nor socialism, neither England nor America; his only living destiny is the silent, ungainsayable law in his own heart, which comfortable habits make it so hard to obey, but which to the self-willed man is destiny and godhead."¹⁹

Like Hesse, the great anarchist thinker, Max Stirner, urged those who wish freedom to follow their self-will. "Do not seek in self-renunciation a freedom which denies your very selves, but seek your own selves.... Let each of you be an all powerful I." Stirner adds that self-will is the strength of an individual against the state and that whatever is accomplished will be accomplished as a unique individual,

¹⁸Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 85.

not as part of a herd. If men can achieve through what Hesse describes as suffering solitude, a self-will, Stirner is of the belief that "neither the state society nor humanity can master this."²⁰

Imitators, Reformers, and World Betterment

Though some might disagree on the effectiveness of self-will as a means of social change, Hesse takes into account that there will always be skeptics and that, while the ideal would be for universal participation, the fact remains that not all men will or can find their destiny. The task is hard. Consequently a leadership of men who have learned to be themselves is needed. It will be these men who alone recognize the destiny of their people, for it will be they alone who will not be satisfied with speeches or government regulation. While these self-willed men are unable to enforce the destiny on others, Hesse calls for all men, if not to seek solitude, at least to listen to those who have "the courage, vitality, the healthy, joyful well wrought good humor that gives rise to true actions."²¹ However, it will be necessary to separate those who are self-willed men from those who imitate them. Hesse specifically implicates socialists, the "men with the red fist and the school book name." Hesse has an admiration for their resolute straight forwardness. The radical activists, he says, have an "intimation" of destiny in that they are ready to face the real causes of social injustice. Hesse admires their energy and says that they are capable "of true action because, if only by an ignominious bypath, they have come close to the point where destiny burgeons."²²

²⁰Guerin, p. 28.

²¹Hesse, War, p. 115.

²²Ibid., p. 106.

However, they are not self-willed men because, as Proudhon believed, they desire to preserve the state, power and authority while increasing its domination over the individual even further. "All they do is change the titles."²³ True self-willed men, as Hesse has defined them, are capable of true action, but this action must be of a personal nature and be directed to the individual, not the state.

Like the socialists, the democratic reformers are also imitators of self-will. After all, Hesse says, the cry for world betterment is being heralded by those who have something to gain from a re-ordered state, but nevertheless a state just the same. Zarathustra asks his listeners to notice that whenever the idea of world government or social reform is brought up, "men reach for their pockets." No, Hesse says, the call for reform is the call of self-interest in disguise. Those who push for this type of action are self seeking, but it is not the type of self seeking that "elevates and steels the self." Instead it is a self seeking which is dependent on "money, vanities, and delusions."²⁴ Hesse, himself, is not convinced that the world can be made better without a cataclysmic event, yet if it is ever to be made better it will not be by reformers or those who are ruled by their own greed and insecurity. Rather, the world will be changed by those earnest self-willed men who have no goals or purposes except to live and be themselves. The world, as Hesse sees it, is "cruel and incalculable," in that only the strong and able, those who remain true to themselves, can succeed. The imitators and reformers can achieve a short lived success with organizations, but the true destiny of men is for those who recognize it.

²³Guerin, p. 22.

²⁴Hesse, War, p. 110.

To those who cannot envision a society without a state and who lament over the loss of cherished national tradition, Hesse says that the real state, the community of men will reappear but in a different form. Instead of the authoritarian structures found in the present, through the destiny of men, a country that is "no longer a stable and hatchery," but rather "a realm without frontiers, the Kingdom of God" will take its place.²⁵

²⁵Hesse, War, p. 93.

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