COSMOLOGY without HEADACHES

(Lecture Series)

(compiling, transcribing, researching, editing always in progress)

LECTURE **XXVI**: **19th Century Upheavals (1): Romanticism**

What is Romanticism?

Our examination seems to show history becoming noticeably more muddled as civilization progresses. Why? History, it seems, is not discovered but decided. Our general acceptance that history changes as we study it is revealed by our contemporary term 'revisionist history' (coined perhaps to help create more jobs for academics as well as supporting rationalist/progressive socio-political ideologies). The term implies that 'revisionists' are finding *truth* and writing the *real* history not known to their teachers or to the great investigators before them. But by gaining this 'truth' of history, might we not be finished with history? Not by a long shot! Pupils of 'revisionists' will find much in their mentors' work that needs revising in concert with a continually changing (evolving, or just wending?) cultural climate. Even the distant past is not immune to improved technology for data compilation and manipulation. But the middle of human history—e.g. classical Greece through the dawn of science and the Enlightenment—presents something of greater clarity than the regions on either end due to the mists that have settled around the very remote past and the increasing information pollution as our study approaches the present. Recent history is further hampered by the lack of a point of perspective.

We look to the past to help explain the present and for insight into our nature—into Nature, in general—such that we might be granted some vague foresight concerning at least the possibilities of the future. That is what led to the idea that we might find some methodical 'science of history'. When we take a look from a very distant point—reduce the scale of our historical map such that we can see large patterns etched over millennia—our present position in it seems tiny; like a point. When we enlarge the scale, closing in and magnifying our current point, expecting resolution into streets and avenues and differentiating rivers and streams and distinguishing landmarks, as with Mapquest or like GoogleEarth, we are disappointed. With history, instead of being clarified, things become blurred—like dollying-in on the planet Venus: a cloud mass; a fogbank. This is because we really cannot tell exactly where we are. What is the defining aspect of our era? How strongly have we been affected by recent movements, and what is the trend? Having lost our view-point we have lost perspective of the more recent events. It is not that we have too little information, but too much. We cannot sort it out in advance of it being sorted out by long periods of development. In a post-apocalyptic, science fiction work a mind-meld of very distant future historians, called the 'Antiquarian Psyconglomerate', explain to their reader that, from the future's remote vantage point, their view of history (including our present)

> …unfolds vastly across the cosmic background. To you [Reader]…however…the pattern is far too broad to be perceived. After all, one can only see his present time-space as if through a microscope, closely and intently, and add his seemingly insignificant few bits of information to the growing pile of data unwittingly forming larger and larger patterns over the passing isochrons [a futuristic time-scale whereby one chron = 15 earth-like years and one isochron = 24 chrons or 360 years]; expansive thought-scapes only discernable from a great distance through the historical telescopes

> of the future. Your own position in the present moment is akin to a sky-writer who sees plenty of smoke, but cannot read his own message—or like the gridiron marching band's lone sousaphonist dotting the *'i'* in **i-g-n-o-r-a-n-c-e**.
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> [*From* GALACTIC EXODUS: COUNTERDANCE OF THE CYBERGODS *by* Michael Somers; Trafford, Canada & US, 2008; p.62]

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic period fairly wiped out the traditions against which the Enlightenment reacted and forced a re-evaluation. The Romantic Age was a prominent part (but certainly not the whole) of that attempt to achieve a new understanding of humanity and human society and our place in nature. Romanticism, especially in its individualistic aspect, defies resolution into a particular definition. We can say, with Jacques Barzun, that it has to do generally with "those Europeans whose birth falls between 1770 and 1815, and who achieved distinction in philosophy, statecraft, and the arts during the first half of the nineteenth century". But these men, displaying opinions strongly in conflict rather than in concert, hardly make up a describable block of thinkers. So, as Barzun tells us, Romanticism has no core of elements. It "is not equivalent to irrationalism, nor sentimentality, nor individualism, nor collectivism, nor utopian aspirations, nor love, nor hate, nor indolence, nor feeblemindedness".

> [It] is not a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, a revolt from Reason, an exaggeration of individualism, a liberation of the unconsciousness, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of pantheism, idealism and Catholicism, a rejection of artistic conventions, a preference for emotion, a movement back to nature, or a glorification of force. Nor is it any of a dozen or more generalities which have been advanced as affording the proper test. It is not any of these things for the simple reason that none of them can be found uniformly distributed among the great romanticists. Mention any such characteristic and a contrary-minded critic will name you a Romanticist who did not possess it; he may even produce one who clearly strove for the opposite

So, then, how are we to define this period? Barzun, in the just quoted paragraph, seems to be trying to identify it by naming everything it wasn't. Besides, not everyone who lived during this period was a 'romantic' any more than everyone who lived during the Age of Scholasticism was a scholastic—or even a scholar. What is the point, then, of denoting a 'Romantic Period'? "…[W]hat we want", says Barzun,

> as a definition of intrinsic romanticism is the thing that gave rise to—and that incidentally explains—all the other attitudes I have enumerated. Why did some romantics attack Reason, why did some turn catholic, why were some liberal, others reactionary? Why did some praise the Middle Ages and others adore the Greeks? Clearly, the one thing that unifies men in a given age is not their individual philosophies but *the dominant problem that these philosophies are designed to solve*. [lecturer's emphasis] …[R]omanticism is first of all constructive and creative; it is what may be called a solving epoch, as against the dissolving eighteenth century.
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> [Barzun, 'Who Are the Romanicists?'; *taken from his* CLASSIC, ROMANTIC, AND MODERN *in* Little, Brown & Co.; 1943; pp.7-17; *reprinted in* THE EUROPEAN PAST: Reappraisals in History since Waterloo, vol.II; S.B. Clough, Peter Gay, & Chas. Warner, eds.; Macmillan, NY, 1964; pp.66-74].

So what exactly was this great problem that defines the age, the problem against which our romantics threw up such a barrage of various reactions? What is it about the Romantic Period in Western history; how does it connect to our cosmology topic? The beauty and serenity, the terror and brutality of nature; the sheer immensity of the Universe; the brief joys and pains of life, enrichment and despair through new knowledge; happiness in success and acquisition and angst over inevitable loss, the grief, the sorrow and forlorn melancholy—all of this was blended into the glory of the human spirit. The soul *could not* be withered by the arid winds of materialism, determinism, sciencism. The soul *should not* be separated from the real world to be treated as abstract, a mere illusion. The soul *would not* accept the 'enlightened' view that Nature and/or the deity was heartless, dumb, and blind—or a fairy tale. No—the world is obviously alive. The Earth bore us along with all its flora and fauna. Terrestrial life is the fruit of the Universe. In any case, that is the perspective from the highest of sentient life forms: us. But now, complained D.H. Lawrence [1885-1930], by this materialist world view:

> We are starved to death, fed on the eternal sodom-apples of thought-forms. What we want is *complete* imaginative experience, which goes through the whole soul and body. Even at the expense of reason we want imaginative experience. For reason is certainly not the final judge of life.
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> Though, if we pause to think about it, we shall realize that it is not Reason herself whom we have to defy, it is her myrmidons, or accepted ideas and thought-forms. Reason can adjust herself to almost anything, if we will only free her from her crinoline and powered wig, with which she was invested in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reason is a supple nymph, and slippery as a fish.
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> [*Emphasis in original. Quoted in* BEREFT OF REASON: *On the Decline of Social Thought and Prospects for Its Renewal by* Eugen Halton (epigraph, ch.6); Univ. of Chicago, 1995; p.191 -- *from* Jugen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Etherialization* (1989), *in* SYMBOLIC INTERACTION *12, no.2: 333-353; (Greenwich, Conn., & London, England)*]

Residue of Rousseau:

The idea of a Romantic Age may be, as Barzun claims, empty of meaning, but *Romanticism* as a movement, at least in art, music, and literature, certainly did occur as a reaction, generally, to the ultimate aridity of materialism. Where was the hope, the happiness which we were supposed to pursue; of which we were advised to become worthy through a life of virtue? If there was to be no reward in the world of phenomena, perhaps the heart should lead the way and might find at least a kind of melancholy fullness. The individual might achieve a heroism of sorts in the valiant if futile struggle against randomness, a blazing glory of human resistance in spite of hopelessness, even were it but a tiny, unobserved spark in the infinite night of an unconscious cosmos.

Not a new faith, exactly, romanticism was an emphasis on life in opposition to the life*less*ness of materialism; a renewal of the vitality of spirit that was threatened by the idea of a mechanical world based on sheer probability. Rational or not, *passion* was aroused from the darkness of its recessive hibernaculum by the very triumph of its antithesis: the brilliant but aimless *sciencism*, which was fomenting a world as abstract as the modern mathematics that had helped expose it. And even were sciencism true and inevitable (and many romantics presumed it was true—thus the reaction's tinge of

melancholy), such an inhuman universe must be somehow humanized. We must then *make* our place in it. Perhaps science should have been enlisted to help bring *that* about instead of trying to reduce humans to something like elementary particles. And if the extremist Berkeleyan-Humeans and the Fichtean-Hegelians were right, that the world is but a sham that has been (and is continually) mentally constructed by its various observers, and if society is but a pack or herd or flock or swarm—a whole that is greater and something quite different and more important or even, in some sense, more 'real' than its merely constituent parts—then either we have built or we have been given *a prison*: a mind-cage conceived by once free men; a trap to bottle up the soul no less than stone walls and steel bars can be configured for confinement of the body. But no density of material nor strictness of reason can contain the mind, since all these 'things'—as, according to the new science-engendered philosophy: *all things*—are shaped and animated *by* mind, which goes where it will.

The present-day materialist's response to that contention is to deny not only the soul, but the mind itself; to admit that the world is real enough—e.g., Kant's phenomenal world—but that our inability to have complete knowledge of it (or *any* certainty at all) is due to the greatest illusion of all: the *illusion of consciousness*. We 'think' we have a mind due merely to the organization and interaction of our constituent parts (cells, corpuscles, nerves, chemistry, synapses, genetic codes, etc., etc.), which all together produce our sense of being: a seeming selfhood that doesn't really exist—further conjuring the false belief that we have minds and that we are essentially individual souls encased in bodies. So, highlighting the basis of socialism and the science of sociology, we must renounce the sham of our individuality if we are to progress toward utopia. We must be made to understand that it is not the person that is important, but the community; not Christians, for instance, but Christianity; not Muslims but Islam; not citizens but nations—France, Germany, China, etc.; and ultimately not humans but humanity. Thus we come to the crux of the matter regarding today's political differences:

Modern 'conservatives', American conservatives particularly, tend toward individualism, believing the most important thing is freedom of the mind—of each mind: your mind; my mind, not the social consciousness or universal mind, in which they tend to disbelieve. Now individual minds can be influenced and manipulated, certainly—humans are malleable to a degree—but the multitude of minds can never be perfectly harmonized. Thus conflict is accepted as inevitable. *Social dissonance*, then, is not a problem to be solved but *a condition of existence*: an unavoidable characteristic of dynamism, of change, of life. Adversity, for instance, as Darwin has shown, is the engine of evolution, and it must be faced and embraced, even while we naturally resist and try to resolve or de-intensify it. Though we might modify antagonism in the direction of nonviolence—albeit only temporarily—strife, anxiety, clashing of values, succumbing and overcoming is the way of the world. Progress (if there is such) cannot be exempted from *re*gress. Human virtue is *engendered* by that very struggle and will exist as long as there are sentient beings. Faith, hope, and charity are not solutions but coping mechanisms. *There is no solution* (beyond doomsday, that is), only interludes of nervous peace with tired enemies pretending to negotiate while they recover from the last battle and regroup. Thus conservatives tend to be defensive: nervous about erosion of their freedom, their inherited culture and laws, their family, their

nation. They are traditionalists being pulled hesitantly through changing times, dubious of radical socio-political change. True, a few of them take the position that the best defense is a strong offense, such as might lead in extreme cases to 'patriotic' vigilantism and/or private armories and militias. They also tend to believe that society is not a unit or an object, but a continual, accidental outcome of individual interaction. So a strong society can only be made by strong individuals. That does not mean supermen—but they are generally in concert with Nietzsche on this much: "Whatever does not kill you makes you stronger". So, though they tend to be sensitive and charitable on a personal level—not heartless, Scrooge-like Malthusians as they are too often portrayed—they are not much enamored with the idea of the welfare state and what seems coddling of the lazy and those unwilling to share the burdens that are imposed by civilization They oppose, thereby, offering a choice to potentially productive and self-reliant individuals to instead remain permanently useless at taxpayers' expense.

What *European* conservatives, it is true, have generally wanted to 'conserve' is state control in the interest of stability. That is why when Europeans (and Latin Americans) speak of the political 'right', they mean those who favor monarchy, aristocracy, or some type of fascism: 'statists', a position stemming from the tradition of sovereignty residing in a ruler rather than in the ruled. What conservatism means in the USA, however, is the conservation of freedom, but at the cost of dealing with some level of disorder and uncertainty in life; to limit the government to powers 'enumerated' in a written agreement between the people in whom sovereignty resides: the *liberal* tradition. The result may be messy, but American conservatives are convinced freedom is worth the inconvenience.

So when Americans speak of those on the 'right', they are really referring to lovers of individual liberty and promoters of non-intrusive government. That meaning seems to have been lost in ignorance and has been successfully twisted by 'leftist' references to NAZIs and 'brown-shirts' and death camps—ignoring that such things, in Europe, were engendered by socialism. Let us not forget the conditions under Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung wherein the society was supposedly sovereign. So, in the USA, 'right' and 'left' are *both* 'liberal' in that we all (well, most—excepting extreme racists and bigots and ideologues on both ends) believe sovereignty lies in the *foundation* of society: with individuals. Americans, then, are all democrats with a lower case 'd'. They differ in their emphasis on the role of government and, recently, find themselves at odds over such things as nationalism *vs*. globalism, human rights *vs*. citizen rights, and how to improve both the economic *and* the ecological systems or somehow reduce life's uncertainties. We'll get deeper into this in our discussion of Marx and how the concept of liberalism has been carried beyond nationalism toward globalism.

Modern 'liberals', on the other hand, see individualism as an impediment to their goal: a final *state* of perpetual peace and good will. They tend to be collectivist in their expectations and policies, having emerged from Rousseau; from the English socialists and utilitarians; from the French sociologists and the Revolutionaries' rejection of tradition; and of course from Hegel, with Marx having the latest and strongest influence. In the USA, however, this country having been founded on the idea of protecting individual rights by limiting the power of the state

(‘governing the government’, as it were), the collectivist position has been difficult to promote and slow to bear fruit. There is auto-resistance to expressions that have to do with ‘controlling the people’ rather than ‘protecting freedom’. Unlike in Europe, where the political ‘right’ has long been associated with the tradition of monarchy and/or the view of the state as a Hobbian ‘Leviathan’ (or its modern autocratic version: oppression in the interest of social stability, such as fascism), the American tradition is individual liberty first, which is what American ‘conservatives’ see themselves defending. Individual rights are assumed as natural, inalienable: neither granted nor subject to impingement by artificial government. So Marxists, collectivists—even those who see themselves as benign socialists—must, in the USA, take care to hide their true beliefs (if they are even fully aware of them) in language carefully chosen to highlight what they assume to be a universal goal: peace and love—little different than the Christian heaven (except, importantly, you don’t have to die to get there): a final condition of perfect accord, for which they propose we ought to sacrifice at least some of our base and meaningless personal desires (the *selfish* passions, headed up by greed and secured by the concept of private property), renouncing them in hope of recovering Eden—or, for the many atheists and agnostics among them, engineering and manufacturing a paradise (accentuating *altruistic* passions). They maintain (with Hegel, *et al*) that freedom is achieved through submission to a state sufficiently powerful to achieve and maintain stability. Also, especially relevant to the Marxists, to teach (i.e., indoctrinate) the undifferentiated masses (who will be absorbed into the proletariat) the Tao of communism: how to live for the whole instead of living off it—but in the modern world, one must also ‘live off it’ or cease living in it. Therefore the whole (the collective as the ultimate reality) is responsible for the nourishment and function of its parts, all of which must be trained so as to act like a finely tuned, high performance engine, every part precisely carrying out its necessary, if limited and mundane assignment to perfection and without complaint. Of course the world is not perfect. Parts will malfunction or break or wear out or, with humans; even rebel. But the social maintenance technicians will simply remove and junk (read: reform, recycle, institutionalize, or liquidate) the ill-formed or poorly operating parts and replace them for the good of the whole—well, let us say for the ‘increase in efficiency’, since ‘good’ is a value laden term and values are anathema to the mechanical concept that lurks behind sociology; *is* the rational foundation of socialism. The bee-hive or ant-hill, then, is an apt analogy in describing the likely result (if not the actual goal) of applying the rationale of the mechanist cosmology to human society. ‘What must be done’, then, is to mold the parts (with humans that means indoctrination rather than education, emphasizing determinism rather than free will) such as to ensure that individuals will fit properly and function in synchrony with the whole—the assembly-line society. More about this when we get to Marx.

So European Romanticism, in its flight into art and poetry and ravings of the heart, might be seen as a conservative (but not right-wing) reaction: an attempt to side-step nihilism and *conserve* the self; to save the human essence from being either kicked into submission by the jackboot of heartless despotism or trampled by the myriad work boots of a mind-bereft proletariat.

Thrust into despondence over the blankness of materialism the romantic soul rejoiced at the idea of a means of escape. If Hume's unknowing, phenomenal *outer*-world and Kant's abstract, transcendental *over*-world held no reward for Man's constant struggle, life must seek meaning in the *inner*-world; must re-evaluate the cosmos from the perspective of the heart—the source of life—rather than from the cold, calculating, objective observatory of the brain. It was clear: an emotionally driven life might be either rewarding or disastrous (or both, alternately) but positive *or* negative feelings can be equally inspirational *or* maddening. That recognition engendered the resignation to brave the unpredictable: to embark upon the seething seas of feeling and explore the diverse and exotic isles of emotion. That is what fueled Romanticism—that *was* Romanticism.

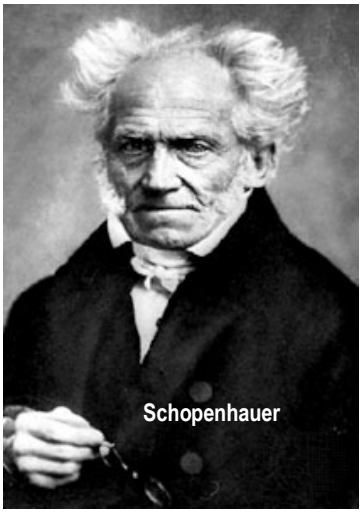
Joseph Turner*: Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On (The Slave Ship)* -- 1840 [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston] *Retrieved from internet site of History Dept., Hanover College*

Later ages *did not* and *do not* and likely *will not* spare their ridicule of the excessive emoting of the 'Romantic Age'. Despite all of that criticism—much of it accurate—Romanticism has not succumbed, suffering only modification and de-intensification. It likely cannot be expunged—not even by the solution of the GUT (as if it could actually happen), or the proof of purely deterministic evolution and accidental commencement of life out of materialistic probability (which we will briefly examine just ahead), or the discovery of strictly mechanical laws as the sufficient cause of all human behavior (which we will also explore). For the initiation of any such events would serve only as the necessary forces and conditions to reignite the fires of the heart.

Romanticism may ebb and flow, even seeming to lie dormant for a season, but romantics are always with us. We are, in fact, all of us potential or tentative romantics—not always obvious, some hearts being deeper in slumber than others—and some, even now, awakening in the face of a tsunami of science and technology: a deterministic materialism applied to life and society and an intellectual skepticism so refined as to doubt even that we are conscious beings capable of being skeptical. A few relics of that slighted past, and representatives of a somewhat modified romantic persuasion, are already wide awake—in fact you see one now, standing unashamed before you. But of course one cannot be solely a romantic, since the inner life: the life of art and literature, theater and music and risky adventure, which is what is always the first association made regarding romantics—that sort of life, by itself, is only a partial life. Science and industry are needed too, and pure romantics tend not to build engines or design software or manage banks and large corporations or run for political office since much of business and technological work requires a considerable focus on the mundane and mechanical: insulating and subduing rather than exposing and unleashing one's emotions. Can you imagine Beethoven as a banker?—or Berlioz as a diplomat?—or Walt Whitman writing cell-phone instruction pamphlets?—or van Gogh selling insurance?

I do not mean to imply that non-artists are somehow less human, nor that artists cannot live double lives and have financial success in other fields. After all Charles Ives was very successful at selling insurance—much more so, financially, than at writing music—which is, I suppose, understandable when you compare his music with his era in America. But a complete life requires an attitude adjustment that artists, generally, tend to avoid as much as possible. But when a whole civilization, over a long period, tends toward ever greater materialism, losing purpose and its grounding morality, a reaction will eventually occur. In any case, the outstanding Western romantic reaction, sufficient in intensity to give its name to a period of history, was pretty much an artist reaction since strict materialism deprives art of depth and reduces it to mere entertainment.

As a kind of gut reaction against the brutal logic of science, Romanticism did not present us with a system of thought of its own. The nearest to such an underlying thought-scheme was presented by the philosophical rebel, Arthur Schopenhauer. In his own rebellion against the obscurantist intellectuals, particularly Hegel, he saw 'will' from a different perspective. Rather than a spirit of the world forming history and synthesizing societies out of clashing social forms through the dialectic—or producing anything in particular—for Schopenhauer 'will' is a blind striving of nature (or, perhaps, *through* nature) for movement and continuance of existence; especially for the *experience* of existence. Through life, especially by means of human lives, it reaches for the ever elusive understanding of itself and of the world. The things of nature are real enough, that is to say apart from our perception of them, but (borrowing a page from Kant—or several hundred pages) they are unknowable at bottom. Our perception is our construct. As reasoning beings we seek the truth, expecting thereby to find some sort of repose. To each of us the blind but striving 'will of the world', by acting through us, seems as our own will.


Schopenhauer

Connected with our reason it takes on an apparent purpose. But the world cannot be fully known and, since we cannot know it, thus cannot know what path might lead us to repose, we are continually frustrated. We are further frustrated by the fact that our particular expression of the will finds itself in conflict with other interpretations by other individuals. So Schopenhauer is an incurable pessimist: the will is doomed to *un*fulfillment; where ever fulfillment seems promising it proves illusory.

In his introduction to THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCHOPENHAUER [Modern Library, NY, 1928, p.xi], Erwin Edman tells us that

> Schopenhauer sings a long dirge of sadness, a long lugubrious description of the way in which the human will oscillates between suffering and boredom. Half of life is the stinging pain of frustration, the other half the dull pain of boredom. Schopenhauer is the apotheosis of romantic irony expressing a romantic disgust over a world that does not meet the needs of the assertive will, and the irony of that will which finds the emptiness of what it thought it needed.

How to escape? One can ignore the *natural* world, albeit only partially and momentarily, by immersing oneself in art, an *artificial* world—especially by producing art, thus creating, in a sense, a more satisfying world that is under our control. But there is more: through art we visit the eternal realm of ideas,

> ...shining and implacable archetypes in which the will may escape change and time, suffering and disillusion….If the plastic and the literary arts reveal the eternal forms of the world, it is in music that the will itself is immediately rendered. And so for Schopenhauer music is the most perfect and successful of the arts since it reveals the will with immediacy and urgency to itself.
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> [Ibid.]

One can easily understand how this impressed Richard Wagner. But aesthetic pleasure is fleeting. A more permanent escape from the frustrations of our struggle to know reality can only be achieved by the ascetic—one must deny the will. But since the world of our experience is an objectification of the will, if one denies it one denies the world. Thus, for the individual, the world is destroyed. The old wisdom of the East thus appealed to Schopenhauer as the answer, arising from his interest in Buddhism. But one must do more than dabble in mysticism, one must become saintly.

> The artist and the ascetic escape from the world into a momentary and paradisial vision of the eternal quietudes of the arts. A saint escapes by reducing the world to nothingness, the denial of his own imperious and blind and indubitably frustrative will. To become a saint by abnegation is to be at peace.

Another way might be suicide. Not so fast!

> Suicide which might seem a more easy and immediate escape is for Schopenhauer no escape at all, for suicide is simply a distraction of the body which is simply one instance of the will; it is not the denial of that universal blind striving will which is the source of all suffering.
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> [Ibid.; p.xiii]

No! Art and saintliness, since happiness is impossible, are the only two means of escape. Though he promotes asceticism as the more permanent, art might seem the best

overall answer since the saint denies the world out of self-interest whereas the works of artists are shared and additive and can bring at least temporary escape to many, and repeatedly—even to multitudes. It seems, however, another route has been overlooked: *ignorance* of all this philosophizing and the acceptance of what happiness (even if illusory) might come through family, small successes, the achievements from work, and an honorable, virtuous, simple existence (*a la* Rousseau): a local rather than worldly life.

Be that as it may, Schopenhauer has highlighted for us the problem of "the romantic will which can never get what it wants and can never love what it gets". In doing so "He was the first one, too, in the history of thought emphatically to insist on the primacy of will over intellect". [Ibid.; xiv] Fine. He has suggested an ethics and a way to see the world from the soul. It may be therapeutic but it falls short as a philosophic system as it hardly explains the will. Describing its affect on the world and our direct experience of it is not sufficient. Our experience of the 'will' may be even more easily ascribed to illusion than is our experience of the material world. Moreover he provides no explanation of how the will interacts with (let alone creates) matter. Here we have something like Kant's transcendental world with the addition of a purpose—or at least a striving, even if the purpose is hidden in a blind coursing or 'non-teleological teleology' —the very thing we will find in Darwin's evolutionary theory.

While we experience this ultra-will directly, we do so in a manner that impresses us with the idea that it is our own immediate willing rather than an aspect of the 'will of the world'. Schopenhauer reminds us of Spinoza's claim that 'were a stone that was thrown to be suddenly granted consciousness, it would think its flight was due to its own will'. Of course, if we are so easily fooled—in our misunderstanding of reality and of the actions of the will—could we not, as suggested above, be deluding ourselves as to the activity of willing itself? If our experience in the world of material is misleading, is it not even more likely that our experience in the metaphysical world is faulty and incomplete?

While Schopenhauer leaves his philosophy wanting as a full system (maybe because he did not believe in the possibility of a coherent philosophical system), he was strongly influential on the development of psychology, particularly on those who were dissatisfied with the purely materialist explanation of human behavior. His consideration of sexuality as a kind of demon was a prelude to Freud. We will also see the obvious influence on Nietzsche's concept of the 'will to power' and Bergson's *élan vital*.

William Wordsworth [1770-1850]

Wordsworth at 28

Wordsworth was another who made an attempt at a kind of non-scientific philosophy (the most prominent at this other than Schopenhauer), though it was subtly blended into his writing without systematic development, thus leaving plenty of room for eons of literary analysis and speculation. Since philosophy had become basically scientific in its truth-seeking, the formulation of an 'emotional philosophy' was pretty unlikely. In any case, all this 'feelingness' filtered down, as it were, and had its effect on how even average, non-literary folk lived and thought about the world—and how they worshipped, as it included a religious revival; a seeming attempt to polish-up a rare positive facet. Otherwise the pall of spiritual hopelessness gave the period a decidedly melancholy tinge.

If nature were indeed unconscious (as reason and science promised); and if life had no ultimate purpose (as Darwinism would further promote), whatever honor and glory and fulfillment could be achieved must be found in the heroism of the futile human struggle: a continual war against an implacable, insentient, undefeatable enemy that could only end for each individual in death. Consciousness was brief, then, and purely materialistic, i.e., technological advance was meaningless; dark death was always lurking. The flame of life, therefore, must be fed by living every moment to the fullest: experiencing as much and as deeply as possible—but it could never be enough.

The romantic angst was expressed in all the arts; an effect that had much to do with the shaping of the arts in the 20th century. It could be looked upon as something like the Renaissance or as a prelude to a new age. In that sense it certainly had an impact, not the least of which was the unleashing of a veritable storm of genius in the arts and literature. There is no denying the awesome flowering from this tear-soaked soil. Surely it had a significant cultural effect, for there may be something to the idea that all geniuses are, if not insane, at least a bit eccentric. They do seem to see things differently than 'normal' folks. They are somehow irregular. They often bring forth unexpected beauty and in unexpected ways. Can we trust them, though, to lead us to a higher place, or might they simply trap us, too, in their madness? This is part of the danger presented by modernity: it cannot accept established boundaries, yet it must establish its own limits or remain indefinable, meaningless, even while it denies the whole concept of boundaries and resists control of any sort. As we have seen, that is how science became a para-religion, by first rejecting the boundaries of dogma, then establishing new ones: boundaries suggested by reason, of course, which simply corralled our civilization with machine-made barbwire instead of hand-hewn rails or stone walls.

It was indeed science that provided (or promised) the last and true boundaries; the firm boundaries, the absolute limits. Every realm of thought since science's emancipation from metaphysics and theology has been affected by this marvelous method of discovering truth. Every discipline began looking to science for directions in understanding life and the Universe. From here on, humanity would be checked only by the laws of nature. In the art of music, for example, pleasing sounds were certainly conjured in accordance with old rules. But simply making pleasing sounds could not be the ultimate end of music, or it would have ended with Mozart and Haydn—and Beethoven would have been impossible or, at the least, bottled up in a sanitarium (after all, his older contemporary, considered today to have been a romantic composer himself), Karl Maria von Weber [1736-1826] remarked that the 5th symphony was all the proof needed of Beethoven's insanity).

The sea of emotion, however, was not endless. The world of ideas is as round as the world of matter. If you travel far enough in your chosen direction, you will end up where you started. Besides, there are few who, like Duke Ellington or Woody Herman or Count Basie, in good times and bad, can stay endlessly on the road. There was a limit, in other words, to the pretense of sublime suffering. It was not in the least progressive, and meanwhile this romantic reaction had absolutely no effect on the runaway accelerando of scientific materialism. So full-blown Romanticism could not endure. It didn't take long, for instance, for composers who were still operating under the imperfect and mostly 'natural' rules of classical harmony to be classified as fossils. Looked at scientifically (that is to say non-passionately; 'objectively') music was nothing but sonic mathematics.

New calculations, then, would make 'modern' music. But that, some few would realize, meant accepting that music is merely organized sound waves, not the breath of a people; the voice of a culture; an expression of the passions; the cry of the soul, but simply interacting vibrations over time in a gaseous medium.

The barrier between music and noise, then, disappeared (temporarily, thanks to whatever cosmic powers may be); lost with the 19th century or knocked down as part of the demolition of all traditional boundaries. As with concepts of good and evil: without the old foundations in authority or faith, guidelines became arbitrary and were often ignored. Restrictions of any sort could not be tolerated. The ugly became beautiful—or rather both terms became meaningless; we could no longer discriminate between harmony and cacophony; organization and chaos became theoretically indistinguishable. In fact, for some of the more radical of modern artists, the point was to 'create' chaos: the apex of artistic achievement—or *nadir* would be as worthy a goal, since even Nature could not create chaos. Then truly they would be gods. Could this be what was meant by Rousseau's warning in his DISCOURSE ON THE ARTS AND SCIENCES [1750] that pursuit of such art as encouraged vanity was corrupting of human nature?—despite the fact that his philosophy was the primal force behind one of the greatest outpourings of self-indulgent art in history and that he himself was a composer; even of theater music: opera, no less (his *Le devin du village* earning praise from Louise XIV and an offer of a pension).

In any case, whichever philosophers or scientists may have had their heart strings tugged (and certainly there were a great many), Romanticism did nothing to change the course or retard the tempo of the march of materialism toward its anticipated coda: a value-free, physics-based science of everything, including a purely reason-based society.

Is Romanticism *Passé*?

Here's what they seem to think at Brooklyn College:

> …[I]t is clear that Romanticism transformed Western culture in many ways that survive into our own times. It is only very recently that any really significant turning away from Romantic paradigms has begun to take place, and even that turning away has taken place in a dramatic, typically Romantic way.
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> Today a number of literary theorists have called into question two major Romantic perceptions: that the literary text is a separate, individuated, living "organism"; and that the artist is a fiercely independent genius who creates original works of art. In current theory, the separate, "living" work has been dissolved into a sea of "intertextuality," derived from and part of a network or "archive" of other texts—the many different kinds of discourse that are part of any culture. In this view, too, the independently sovereign artist has been demoted from a heroic, consciously creative agent, to a collective "voice," more controlled than controlling, the intersection of other voices, other texts, ultimately dependent upon possibilities dictated by language systems, conventions, and institutionalized power structures. It is an irony of history, however, that the explosive appearance on the scene of these subversive ideas, delivered in what seemed to the establishment to be radical manifestoes, and written by linguistically powerful individuals, has recapitulated the revolutionary spirit and events of Romanticism itself.
>
> *Adapted from* A GUIDE TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE: A *COMPANION TEXT FOR CORE STUDIES* 6, 'LANDMARKS OF LITERATURE', © English Department, Brooklyn College.

That Romanticism is difficult to define ought to be expected as it has to do with individuality, and the interior is unique to each individual. At bottom one might say it's one against all; person against system. The individual, acting in accord with his inner spirit, seems about as natural as you can get. After all, one sees the world as a unique observer. If one did not there would be no need for art or literature. What would be the point, if not to impress one's observations, thoughts, ideas, feelings, upon others; alter their views; expand their consciousness? Even bees, among the most collectivist sorts of separate beings of which we know, must observe individually and then, somehow, as if artistically, symbolically communicate something like maps for their hive mates—or they couldn't continue in their practically eternal system; in their social existence.

The greatest and highest level of art in the ancient world—painting, statuary, architecture—was done by masters of a genre who could append their personality, as it were, something of their soul to their works. Only thus, as unique individuals, could they affect the collective. The art of literature is less obvious in this regard due to the dearth of literate individuals, so that written works were restricted to a very few, except for the drama and poetry that was recited, played-out, or sung in public—thus to impress a view of the writer upon those who, perhaps, did not see as deeply as the author. These were expressions of his heart and soul. And isn't that exactly Romanticism? So the argument that there is something like exaltation of the individual mind is not unique to modern civilization. This attitude, however, could only become a broad cultural movement when many more folks were educated sufficiently to become involved; to be affected by it and to consciously join its ranks. Thus Rousseau is not actually the first to be a Romantic. He was such, however, and expressed such at a crucial time when circumstances of society were urging many others to take the bait.

All this has been brought up only to suggest that Romanticism is not so startlingly new in the late 18th century and that the 19th century hardly exhausted the movement. The circumstances had simply changed again, especially with the socialist/collectivist ideas coming into vogue in a way that tended to stifle individualism. Then, after the 'Great War', came the rise of fascism in the early 20th century, as a means of curing the disease of war, glorifying only one particular individual over all others and restricting individual expression as politically problematic—in the interest, of course, of stability, equality, and uniformity of thought. After all, if we allow disagreement we encourage contention. To cure contention, we must prevent disagreement: all must agree as completely as possible with the leader—or be ostracized or even extracted from the society. But romanticism is an idea; a very natural idea and cannot be killed or eradicated, which is why socialist-collectivist-communist type society is a fleeting thing—as with all systems of social relations, for that matter.

If it hasn't become obvious to you, let me reiterate: like life for an individual, social momentum is a rollercoaster. Rather than purely progressive, it is more like a spiral—a coil—somewhat cyclical in nature because there are only two extremes: anarchy and tyranny (neither of which can be sustained due to their mutual repulsion). So in a dynamic Universe constantly and unpredictably varying in circumstance, human social conditions are extended confusingly through time.

This is why revolutions are not forward looking. Despite rhetoric of fomenters to the contrary, such movements are reactionary, which is one reason why they do not work out. There is no plan for governing until, with victory, it becomes necessary to patch

something together—often something familiar; a lot like the overthrown regime only with different rulers. It is the same with philosophical movements. There is little wisdom to them beyond what is advanced in retrospect. The Earth turns; ideas are scrambled; a new generation repudiates the old, which they see as imperfect, foolish, and incompetent: at least unsuited for the task of social architecture—even though what youth offers in exchange is untried, unfinished, self-contradictory, ignorant or contemptuous of history, thus filled with uncertainty and doomed to failure. One thing is certain: ever advancing technology will not save us. It will only transform us into robots. We are already its slaves and it doesn't even have a purpose or even a mind! The reaction against it will come and it will be spiritual: more like a retreat into the soul, the heart, the mind. When that proves ineffective in the real world, we'll try something else. We may even give up for a spell and sink into something like Islam. How's that system working out for the world? However that may be, the effort to define and establish the best regime must be made and all the arguments reformulated and advanced, over and over, *ad infinitum*—even though we know the question "What must be done?" can never satisfactorily be answered. After all, change is the only constant.

HANDOUTS

FOR SUPPLEMENTAL READING:

Essay *from* THE PERSISTENCE OF ROMANTICISM: *Essays in Philosophy and Literature by* Richard Eldridge; Cambridge Univ. Press; 2001—chapter 8: "How Can Tragedy Matter for Us?" – (*Essay is on* pp.145-164)

ALSO,

At end of this lecture, the letter of **George Sand**. [George Sand to Michel de Bourges *found in the chapter:* 'Politics and Patronage': *Art and Revolution in* PLEASURES OF MUSIC; Jacques Barzun, ed.; Viking Press (Compass Books), NY, 1960; pp.371-376]

MANDATORY:

Last chapter of Theodosius Dobzhansky's MANKIND EVOLVING: *The Evolution of the Human Species*; Yale, New Haven, Conn., 1962; ch.12: "The Road Traversed and the Road Ahead"; pp.319-348 (*end*)

FOR PERSONNAL EDIFICATION (especially his views on art and music):

All of PART III "World as Idea" *by* Schopenhauer *as found in* THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCHOPENHAUER; Modern Library, NY, 1928 pp.135-214

In closing this session, some remarks about the middle of the 19th century seem apropos. My History of Music teacher at Northwestern, Mr.Bigelow (a man steeped in early music, having studied Bach and the harpsichord under Wanda Landowska, and who had also a great love of, and considerable expertise in opera), said during his first lecture that he was not so interested in precise dates, like births and deaths of the famous, as he was in teaching us, "the great unwashed", to recognize the periods of music; how they developed and merged and influenced the next and faded away, and he promised he would hold us to only one important date: the opening of the first opera house in Venice in 1637. Now you, too, will likely remember that date above all others, so I shall not ask it from you—well, maybe I will, just so you can prove you were listening. I may expect a couple more (800...; 1492...; 1543...; 1600...; 1776...; 1789...; 1905...) but the one we are concerned with here is especially big in the history of the modern West. Jacques Barzun in his very interesting book: DARWIN, MARX, WAGNER reminds us Darwin's ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY NATURAL SELECTION; Marx's CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY; and Wagner's *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE* all came to light in **1859**, all three stoking intense debates that still resound.

He neglected to mention a few more things nearly as portentous: John Stuart Mill published his ESSAY ON LIBERTY, which we may briefly examine in comparison to Marx, and Charles Dickens [1812-1870] wrote A TALE OF TWO CITIES, which we will not examine, beyond mentioning that it is in great part an admonition to England's more comfortable classes that the horror of turning society upside down, per the French Revolution and Reign of Terror, is a latent possibility if social injustice is not rectified and careless contempt for the unfortunate lower classes continues. "Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms", he warns. "Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind" [Book 3, ch.15; p.385 Edited by Richard Maxwell; Penguin Classics, London, 2003].

It was also in 1859 that Bunsen and Kirchoff began their work in spectrum analysis, which we have discussed as leading to astrophysics and immensely influential in modern chemistry and the advance toward modern physics. The fateful year witnessed the birth of French 'process' philosopher, Henri Louis Bergson [1859-1941], whom we will meet in the early 20th century. Also, the first oil well was drilled at Titusville, Pennsylvania, while at almost the same time the first practical internal combustion engine was built by Lenoir in France; R.L.G. Plante invented the first storage battery; a primitive typewriter was invented by Christopher L. Scholes; and work began on the Suez Canal. In October radical abolitionist John Brown and his followers seized the U.S. government arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, where he planned to establish an independent state, in preparation for the expected slave insurrection in the South, as a sanctuary for the escaped slaves. Such insurrection, of course, did not take place; the arsenal was subsequently stormed by the U.S. Army; Brown was captured, tried, and hanged as a traitor—all in 1859. In the following year Abraham Lincoln [1809-1865] was elected President of the United States, at which event South Carolina attempted to secede from the Union. By the time Lincoln was inaugurated in January of 1861, six more states had followed suit, precipitating the American Civil War. 1860, incidentally, also witnessed the birth of Ignace Paderewski [1860-1941] and Gustav Mahler [1860-1911].

More trivially, we might mention the debut of organized baseball in San Francisco, before we resume, in our next three sessions, our investigation of the great intellectual landmarks of 1859.