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ABSTRACT

GEORGES SOREL: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

By

Thomas C. Smith

A comprehension of the depth and diversity of the thought of Georges Sorel presents a formidable challenge. The bibliography of Sorel's writings, speeches and correspondence has not reached its final, definitive form; and without a thorough examination of these sources a synthetic view would be without credibility. The current state of knowledge as represented by the secondary accounts of the thought of Georges Sorel is characterized by obscurity and complicated by contradictory conclusions. In order, therefore, to provide a more reliable perspective from which to proceed to a more credible conclusion with respect to Georges Sorel, it is necessary to re-examine Sorel's original statements and to include in this examination the widest sampling of his thought.

In the course of the ensuing study, new data have been uncovered and presented for analysis with the result that the ultimate conclusions which are set forth in Chapter IX are based upon the most complete bibliography

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of the writings of Georges Sorel currently available. The organizational format adheres rigorously to a chronological presentation which methodically explores the writings of Sorel as they appear in the expanded bibliography of his works. The choice of a chronological arrangement of analysis was made on the basis of expediency and in the hope that it would provide a convenient order of development such that the reader, who might wish to consult only certain of Sorel's works, could by reference to the bibliography of his works, turn immediately to the appropriate chapter. No explicit conclusions or evaluations are offered in the course of this study until the complete bibliography has been examined. To counter the implicit subjectivity of selection and juxtaposition, I have provided very extensive documentation such that my analysis might be easily evaluated by a researcher with access to the original works. Any particular work by Sorel which has been analyzed in this study is available for consideration as an isolated entity and although I have attempted in the final chapter to provide a synthetic analysis of Sorel's thought as a whole, I have also undertaken to illuminate each work as an individual expression of his mind.

The major findings of this research include the development of the most complete and accurate bibliography of Sorel's works, a bibliography which will be of use to

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future students of Sorel. Based upon a study of this extended bibliography in the first eight chapters, I have drawn conclusions about the thought of Georges Sorel which have appeared in no previous account of his works and which represent a major reinterpretation. I have concluded that epistemology, understood as that branch of human inquiry concerned with the problems of the nature, limits, and validity of human knowledge and belief, forms the central and most persistent concern in the intellectual preoccupations of Georges Sorel. The precise outlines of Sorel's epistemological formulations can be detected in speculations which occur throughout his entire writing career and include his preoccupations with the subjective and psychological aspect of all formulations of the human mind, his vision of the artificial and natural milieux, and his rejection of determinism in any form. I do not believe that it would be possible, based on an analysis of his writings, to comprehend Sorel's other speculations on science, sociology, history, pessimism, tradition, linguistics and myth, without a thorough understanding of these epistemological judgments. The great confusion which is characteristic of most secondary accounts of Sorel's ideas results from the attempt to consider a particular Sorel formulation out of the context of his epistemological convictions.

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Thomas C. Smith

There is another equally valid experience of Georges Sorel's thought, one which perhaps he would have considered more important than the reinterpretation which I have attempted. Sorel wanted to stimulate thought. He wished to stir personal speculation. I have attempted to retain this aspect of Sorel's thought by presenting an analysis sufficiently detailed to provide the needed context for an appreciation of his habits of mind. To preserve the style and syntax of his speculations, I have retained his original French in the body of the text while the English translations appear in the footnotes.

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GEORGES SOREL: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

By

Thomas C. Smith

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

1974

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DEDICATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to the members of my Guidance Committee who have each provided helpful influence in the formation of this research project. Dr. William J. Brazill as Chairman has exhibited a sophisticated sensitivity to the special conditions of intellectual historiography which has been of great value to me in determining the epistemological ground from which to approach this research. Dr. Paul R. Sweet as a Diplomatic historian has taught me the incomparable value of primary source material for establishing the integrity of a thesis which is reflected in the extent to which Georges Sorel's own writings form the basis for the conclusions which I draw about his thought. Dr. Donald N. Baker whose course in French Social Thought was the occasion for my first encounter with Sorel and whose previous course in Historiography awakened in me an interest in the epistemological problems confronting contemporary historians.

I wish to also thank the History Department of Michigan State for the three-year National Defense Fellowship and the one-year Teaching Assistantship

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which together helped to finance my studies at East Lansing, and thanks to the Department of Humanities of Michigan State University for the position of Instructor which provided the funds for my Paris research. While in Paris I was able to benefit from the fine cooperation of the staff and the facilities of the Bibliotheque Nationale, the Bibliotheque de l'Universite de Paris Sorbonne and the Bibliotheque Cujas De Droit Et Sciences Economiques, for which I express my appreciation. And to countless other people and institutions I am gratefully indebted.

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A NEW PERSPECTIVE
ON GEORGES SOREL

Too often in the history of ideas, complex and difficult thinkers are systematically reduced to a kind of summary coherence for the sake of convenient presentation. The danger of such an approach is that the desire for logic and coherence, which often impels it, may produce errors of interpretation which only the closest examination of minute details, however contradictory they might be, could resolve. Because of the diversity of his interests and the very style of his thought, Georges Sorel has proven to be a thinker who has inspired a great variety of interpretation. To a large extent this diversity is attributable to the provocative nature of the problems and the solutions which Sorel elaborated. There is a great tendency to argue with various of the Sorel speculations, to ignore the attempt to reproduce his thought while opting instead for the more rhetorically satisfying refutation of it. Unfortunately this approach has not led to a comprehension of the thought of Georges Sorel.

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The following study of the thought of Georges Sorel seeks to avoid the dangers of premature judgment in the interest of providing what appears to be so needed in the case of Sorel--an exposition of his thought. That this exposition is needed became apparent to me in the early stages of my study of the secondary accounts of his ideas following a comparison of these to my reading of Sorel's original works. The contradictions between what Sorel appeared to be saying and the analysis of his ideas in the secondary accounts (some of which are detailed in a concluding review of secondary accounts in Chapter IX) were often based on incomplete or inaccurate representations of Sorel's writings. These were the observations which caused me to seek a more accurate picture of Sorel and to present this picture in such a way that a credible and comprehensive vision might slowly materialize. The integrity of the following study resides upon the extent to which I have fairly reproduced the major themes as they occurred in Sorel's writings, speeches, and correspondence. To this end I have provided sufficient documentation such that my analysis might easily be reviewed and evaluated. In the preparation of this analysis, I have also been influenced by Henri Bergson's concept of the "expérience intégrale" which I believe has special application to an interpretation of Sorel and could serve as a salutary antidote to all analysis which is made suspect by

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over-generalization. Bergson believed that an integral experience could not emerge without an exhaustive exposure to the most minute facts which only after having been massively accumulated could be fused to obtain an integral comprehension. In the instance of Georges Sorel, previous studies have failed to accumulate sufficiently the fragments of his thought as it was elaborated over time.

I place before the reader the following study which reproduces my research process almost exactly as it unfolded during the eight months I spent working in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. As a remedy to premature judgment, I withheld until the final chapter any presumption about the ultimate conclusion to which this study might lead. I also resisted the inclination to argue with Sorel's interpretations or to judge their moral, social, or historical worth, in order to pursue more directly my goal of discovery--and also because I believe the reader is better served by a work which allows these normative evaluations a spontaneous and personal birth. To this extent I invite the reader to become a student of Sorel and to participate in what ultimately is a process of research. I believe that the detailed analysis of the writings, speeches, and letters of Georges Sorel which comprise the first eight chapters of this study will suffice to justify the conclusions I have reached in the final chapter. In my attempt to

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reproduce the thought of Sorel--to illustrate as directly as possible his habits of mind--I have produced a study which remains laborious and tedious, characteristics which I have found unavoidably associated with the discovery of the thought of Georges Sorel.

The conclusions to which this study led call into question the validity of much of the interpretative work on Sorel which is currently available. These conclusions, outlined in the Abstract, represent a fundamental reinterpretation of the thought of Georges Sorel and to the extent that they can be shown to reside upon Sorel's own writings they must be of immediate interest to any of his students. Only by seeking the complexity and diversity of Sorel and by avoiding the inclination to generalize prematurely or to debate normative issue with him has it been possible to advance through what at first appears a labyrinth of detail to an integral interpretation of his thought.

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A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER I

Perhaps by design but certainly in fact, Georges Sorel's personal past, preceding the launching of his writing career in 1886, remains virtually unknown. Pierre Andreu, whose study of Sorel was published in 1952, provided the first documented account of Sorel's educational background and his family life as well as his relationship with the intriguing Marie David. Part 1 of Chapter I relates these details for the sake of establishing an initial point of departure for the analysis of Sorel's writings which follow. The story is not greatly detailed and it appears probable that Sorel intended to keep this part of his life as private as possible--in all of his writings he avoided linking his thought to a personal past.

Sorel himself suggested the best approach to the comprehension of his thought when he noted that a reader would have difficulty understanding an innovative self-educated writer such as himself " . . . because one can only attain it by rediscovering the inventor's path."¹

¹See Chapter I, Part 1, note 4.

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Part 2 of Chapter I is a detailed analysis of Sorel's first book-length study entitled The Trial of Socrates, and as such represents an attempt to rediscover not only the content of his early thought but also to know his methodology, which together represent the "inventor's path."

Part 3 of Chapter I depicts Sorel's evaluation of certain aspects of the thought of Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Karl Marx as well as early formulations of his ideas on epistemology, linguistics, history and the impact of ideologies on human action. His notions of the sexual basis of Christian mysticism and his call for the liberation of women from their traditional subservient status appear in the concluding analysis of Chapter I, Part 3.

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CHAPTER I

GEORGES-EUGENE SOREL 1847 - 1894

Part 1

Origins: 1847 - 1889

What little is known about the life of Georges Sorel prior to the commencement of his public life as a writer is contained in the first biography of his thought written by Pierre Andreu and published in 1953 in Paris under the title of Notre maître M. Sorel. The depiction of Sorel's origins, his family and educational pursuits contains a valuable appendix which includes a list of books borrowed by Sorel from the Bibliotheque de Perpigan during the formative period of his writing career.

Georges Sorel was born in Cherbourg on November 2, 1847. His maternal grandfather, Pierre Salley, had been an officer in the Grande Armée and had been decorated on the battle-field by Napoleon.¹ His father, Pierre Gustave Sorel, was a merchant, so absorbed in business affairs that, according to George Sorel's German cousin Albert Emile

¹Pierre Andreu, Notre maître M. Sorel (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1953), p. 24. (Hereinafter referred to as M. Sorel.)

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3. Andreu, M. S.
4. Ibid.

Sorel: " . . . la dévotion maternelle l'initiait à une piété qui devait imprégner son caractère de mysticisme."² Georges had three brothers of whom Anatole and Ernest would enter the École Polytechnique some years later. A third brother, Henri, died at the age of three in 1848. In the same year the fortunes of the Sorel family were undermined. Pierre Gustave Sorel, suffering reversals in his business, was faced with severe financial difficulties. The family confronted the austerity of these new conditions with what a neighbor recalled as "heroic acceptance which resulted in the rehabilitation of Pierre Gustave Sorel."³ Pierre Andreu speculated that "these financial difficulties, by isolating Georges Sorel from his class, may have predisposed him later to accept socialist ideas."⁴

The Sorel family moved from Cherbourg to Paris in the hope of finding a more favorable commercial climate. Writing in 1872 to a friend in Cherbourg, Nathalie Sorel, Georges' mother, offered a typical Parisian lament: "Que pourrais-je dire de Paris? Rien autre chose qu'il pleut tous les jours et que les rues sont remplies de boue."⁵ Very little beyond this letter remains to suggest the

² Andreu, M. Sorel, p. 24, from an article which appeared in le Figaro written by Albert Emile Sorel a few days after Georges Sorel had died.

³ Andreu, M. Sorel, p. 26.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 316.

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character of life for the Sorel family during its lengthy sojourn in Paris. By 1879, Georges had lived several years of partial separation from his family. Absorbed in studies and later a career, his life gradually became more and more independent.

Georges Sorel was an excellent student. At the collège de Cherbourg he completed his baccalauréate examinations at the age of seventeen, and in 1864, he won first prize in elementary mathematics at an academic gathering of six lycées and eight collèges under the jurisdiction of Caen. In a preparatory class in the École de Marine he received first prize in algebraic arithmetic and trigonometry, and in the preparatory class of Saint-Cyr he again won first prize in mathematics as well as natural history, cosmography and mechanics. To prepare for entry into the École Polytechnique in Paris, he studied for one year at the Collège impérial Rollin. Here his mentors described him as an "excellent élève à tous égards . . ." ⁶ In October, 1865, he was admitted to his first course in the École Impériale Polytechnique. He completed two years of study, passed his final examinations and in 1867 was admitted into the Ponts et Chaussées. In 1870, Sorel's formal education was completed and he was assigned a post in Corsica. Shortly after his departure from Paris

⁶Ibid., p. 318.

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the Franco-Prussian war began. The empire of Napoleon III fell, the city of Paris was under siege, the commune rose and fell and finally, amid disarray and confusion a new French Republic was declared. How these events effected Sorel is unknown. He remained on the island of Corsica for the duration of the war. And his activities up to 1886, when his public career as a writer was launched, are largely unknown. He had been, during his days at the Polytechnique, an ardent royalist in his support for the Comte de Chambord whom he predicted would capture Paris "by force at the head of an army of volunteers."⁷ At the head of his school papers he delighted in writing: "Vive Henry V."

Georges Sorel became a brilliant administrator, and his career was marked by the recognition of his co-professionals. In 1891, he was nominated Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, and in 1892 he was named Ingénieur en Chef de première classe. The death of his mother in 1887, and a resulting inheritance, led to his early resignation from the Ponts et Chaussées in 1892. Sorel retired to Paris, moving a few months later to Boulogne-sur-Seine where he remained until his death in 1922. The municipal council of the village of Perpignan extended their warm thanks to him for his work in their behalf and recorded their gratitude in a letter dated August 29,

⁷Ibid., p. 32.

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1892. This document commemorated the conclusion of Sorel's administrative career. The municipal library of Perpignan also recorded the work of the Ingénieur en Chef of the village between 1884 and 1891. These records marked the origins of Sorel's career as a writer. They provide a rare glimpse of the intellectual roots of what students of Sorel have termed the beginning of his second life.⁸

In 1897, Sorel wrote a letter to Benedetto Croce in which he described his great sorrow at the death of a woman who had been his companion for twenty-two years. He first encountered Marie David in 1875 in a hotel in Lyon where he was recuperating from an illness. Born in Chanay on June 6, 1845, Marie David's life had been difficult and austere. She had worked as a laborer in several factories prior to her move to Lyon where she was employed in the hotel where Sorel had fallen ill. Pierre Andreu speculated that Sorel would not have inclined toward Socialism but for the influence of Marie David on his life and thought.⁹ Sorel himself left ample testimony to his deep affection and great admiration for her. "She has been my companion through 22 years of

⁸Ibid., pp. 320-23. See also Appendix A which is a reproduction of the original record of the Municipal Library of Perpignan.

⁹Andreu, M. Sorel, pp. 39-40.

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work," he wrote to Croce, "during which time I was bound to her with the ardor of first love. Her memory will remain the best part of me for she remains the true soul of my life."¹⁰

Almost illiterate when they met, Marie made rapid progress in the daily instruction which Sorel provided. Sorel's niece recounted Marie David's intellectual growth and her great devotion to the relief of poverty and misery, and her despair of injustice which she longed to mitigate.¹¹ Sorel later dedicated his most influential work, Reflections on Violence, to her memory and wrote in a letter to Agostino Lanzillo that she " . . . fait partie de ma vie d'écrivain socialiste . . . Je l'ai perdu en 1897, en depuis lors je puis dire que j'ai travaillé pour élever un monument philosophique digne de sa mémoire."¹²

Sorel's family refused to accept Marie David as a daughter-in-law, viewing the potential marriage as a horrible déclassement. And Georges Sorel, following the death of both of his parents, remained bound by their will. He and Marie were unwed and childless through the duration of their union. "Happy is the man," he wrote in

¹⁰Ibid., p. 38.

¹¹Ibid., p. 41.

¹²Ibid., p. 40. " . . . made part of my socialist writer's life. . . . I lost her in 1897, since then I can say that I worked to raise a philosophical monument worthy of her memory."

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an article devoted to Rousseau, "who has encountered an energetic and proud woman whose love keeps him forever young, and who prevents his spirit from resting in idleness by recalling to him the obligations of his tasks, and sometimes even revealing to him his highest potential."¹³

Writing in the introduction to the Reflections on Violence, Sorel described the labor of self-education which he had undertaken during the period of his transition from a career as an administrator to that of a thinker and writer.

I am neither a professor [he wrote] nor a populariser of knowledge, nor a candidate for party leadership. I am a self-taught man exhibiting to other people the notebooks which have served for my own instruction. . . . During twenty years I have worked to rid myself of what I retained of my education. I read books not so much to learn as to erase from my memory the ideas which had been pressed upon it. . . . I have had to be my own master and in a way to educate myself. . . . I put before my readers the working of a mental effort which is continually attempting to break through the bonds of what has been previously constructed for common use, in order to discover what is truly personal and individual. . . . A reader has great difficulty in grasping the thought of an inventor because one can only attain it by rediscovering the inventor's path.¹⁴

¹³Andreu, M. Sorel, p. 40.

¹⁴Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence, trans. by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 32-33.

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In 1889, Sorel published his first books: Le Procés de Socrate and Contribution à l'étude de la Bible. While the Third Republic was celebrating the centennial of the Révolution, Sorel showed himself unsympathetic to the revolutionaries of old and fearful of the intentions of the republicans of his day. More revealing, however, than a summary treatment of his contentions would be, as he advised, to grasp the thought of the inventor by rediscovering his path.

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APPENDIX A

IV

- LIVRES EMPRUNTÉS PAR GEORGES SOREL A LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE
MUNICIPALE DE PERPIGNAN DURANT LA PÉRIODE 1884-1891.
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- RENAN.--Les Évangiles. Les Apôtres. L'Église chré-
tienne (3 vol.) (14 mars-I^{er} mai 1885).
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(5-13 mai 1885).
- Revue philosophique, janvier-juin 1877 (16 octobre 1885).
-- 2^e année, t. IV (17 --
-- -- t. V (24 --
-- -- t. VI (31 --
-- -- t. VII, janvier-juin 1879
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-- juillet-décembre 1881 (14 novembre
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-- juillet-décembre 1882 (25 novembre
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1885).
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1885).
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- Revue philosophique, juillet-décembre 1884 (2 décembre
1885).
-- juillet-décembre 1880 (4 décembre
1885).
- VIOLLET-LE-DUC.--Dictionnaire del'architecture, t. VII
(10 décembre 1885).
- CHOISY.--L'Art de bâtir chez les Byzantins (12 decembre
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- VIOLLET-LE-DUC.--Entretiens sur l'architecture, t. II
(15 decembre 1885).
- Ch. BLANC.--Grammaire des arts du dessin (19 decembre
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- VIOLLET-LE-DUC.--Dictionnaire, t. I (29 decembre 1885).
-- -- t. III (5 janvier 1886).

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- ALFERNA (?).--Le Son et la musique (6 mai 1886).
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Novum Testamentum. Vetus Testamentum (14 mai 1886).
Flavien Joseph (5 vol.).
 NOTRE MAITRE, M. SOREL
- RENAN.--Vie de Jésus (18 mai 1886).
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- Revue des Deux Mondes, 1884 (17 juin 1886).
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- RAVAISSON.--Métaphysique d'Aristote (2 vol.) (9 octobre 1886).
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ARISTOTE.--La Génération (3 février 1887).
 -- Le Ciel (17 février 1887).
 WUNDT.--Physiologie humaine (1^{er} mars 1887).
 COMTE.--Cours de philosophie positive (8 mars 1887).
 DESCARTES.--Passions de l'âme. Le Monde (9 mars 1887).
 -- Lettres, t. VI (12 mars 1887).
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Part 2

The Trial of Socrates: 1889

The following examination of Sorel's The Trial of Socrates seeks to discover the path which this thinker chose to follow and to elaborate the positions which he embraced. It is not meant to be a criticism of Sorel; it is a process which aims first at discovery. The object is to know the thinker, his methodology and his conclusions. This will suffice to satisfy the need to become aware of the intellectual dimensions of the work of Georges Sorel. I am content to leave to others, the readers of this analysis in particular, to apply their own criteria to the usefulness, value and truth of Georges Sorel's conclusions. My purpose is to find the path and to observe, as faithfully as possible, its twists and turns.

Who was the real Socrates? What were his teachings? What was his influence? These questions and others were posed by Sorel in the preface to The Trial of Socrates published in 1889. His views are stated in an unequivocal manner. "There has been, " wrote Georges Sorel, "a conspiracy among philosophers and historians deliberately to misrepresent Greek history and especially the figure of Socrates."¹ The philosophers, he believed, by

¹Georges Sorel, le Procès de Socrate (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1889), pp. 5, 18. (Hereinafter referred to as Socrate.)

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defending Socrates as a martyr to freedom of thought, had acted in their own interests in so far as they too were often in conflict with authority. But, he stated, their motives are even more specific: in the 18th and early 19th centuries Socrates was celebrated as the alleged victim of the Athenian priests; a deliberate distortion which was perpetrated as a means of attacking the influence of the contemporary clergy.² The historians, too, had falsified the moral theories of the Socratic teachings, and had hidden the vices of their Greek heroes.³

Georges Sorel admired Socrates as a thinker of unquestioned stature. In concluding his study he wrote: "le monde salua en lui le créateur de la philosophie. Jamais hommage rendu à un homme ne fut plus légitime. . . . le monde grec semblait dater de Socrate."⁴

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 18. In connection with this accusation, Sorel made the following observation: "Nous comprenons leur réserve, s'ils ont agi ainsi par respect pour la pudeur de leurs lectrices. . . . L'histoire de l'antiquité ne doit pas être mise entre les mains de jeunes filles."
Ibid., p. 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 280. "the world saluted him as the creator of philosophy. Never was homage rendered to a man more legitimate. The Greek world seemed to date from Socrates."

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In fact, Sorel stated, one would wish that Socrates had been the apostle and martyr of liberty, but in this hope one could not be more completely disappointed. For in the state which Socrates had envisioned, Sorel believed, the mind of man would have been supervised, directed and oppressed.⁵ His state would have been ecclesiastic. The only freedom which the citizen could have claimed would have been the freedom to do what was considered good.⁶ The ideal of Socrates was a state transformed into a church, with everything tending toward the good, such as the leaders understood the word.⁷

To accomplish this end, Socrates⁸ set out to break the chains which bound the citizens to the ancient city of Athens. These bonds were those of military discipline. The citizen was primarily a soldier. He participated in a system of education destined to train and prepare him for war. The Socratics, Sorel wrote, demanded the freedom to destroy this ancient society,

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Ibid. Sorel gave special emphasis to "la liberté du bien."

⁷Ibid., p. 9. Here Sorel chided the revolutionaries whom he seemed to have in mind while writing the passage: "La fraternité ou la mort, hurlaient les hallucines de '93." Ibid., p. 9.

⁸Sorel blamed Plato along with Socrates whom he stated had, "renchéri sur son maître, mais il a suivi ses principes." Ibid., p. 7.

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⁹ Ibid., p. 1
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but they intended to replace it with a distasteful tyranny. Like the French philosophers at the end of the eighteenth century Sorel recalled, who once attaining a semblance of power, attacked and persecuted the Christian Church and fabricated new dogma to be forcefully imposed, the Socratics sought an opportunity to establish their preponderance.⁹

One of the principle errors of Socrates, Sorel continued, was his confusion of morality, law and science. And this had a continuing debilitating effect as the influence of Socrates grew. The trial of Socrates, added to this allegation, the charge of contributing to moral corruption, and Sorel believed that the morals of Socrates' disciples were strongly suspect, especially those of Plato. By expostulating the separation of soul and body, Socrates so elevated the soul (which was synonymous with intelligence or perhaps mind) that it became possible to consider as indifferent those actions in which intelligence played little part.¹⁰ Plato seemed to have been especially guilty of exaggerating this dimension of his master's teaching and Sorel therefore rejected Plato as a

⁹Ibid., p. 8. Sorel compared also the Calvinists to his Socratics: "Calvin demandait le droit d'enseigner ce qu'il prétendait être la vérité; mais il entendait que ses adversaires fussent réduits au silence, comme perturbateurs scandaleux de l'ordre divine." Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 10.

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trustworthy transmitter of Socratic doctrines, though he remained worthy of blame for disseminating a pernicious influence.¹¹ In fact, Sorel concluded that Plato's The Banquet and The Republic were two books which had dishonored the Greek genius.¹²

Prior to Socrates, Sorel wrote, the Sophists had worked to ruin Greek society. But Socrates exposed the error of their false reasoning, thereby ruining their schools. Why, Sorel asked, could he not then found morality on a solid basis? Is morality an insoluble problem, he asked? The followers of Socrates, he continued, did even less. Plato ended in reverie. And the Stoics, whose morality Sorel found closest to that of Socrates in the ancient world, produced nothing good; the ancient world was therefore consumed by corruption. It remained for the Christian Church to offer a way out of what Sorel called l'abime.¹³ Socrates further failed, Sorel wrote, to understand the meaning of work. He did

¹¹Ibid. Sorel wrote: "Nous utiliserons le moins possible le témoignage de Platon, qui nous semble avoir défiguré la pensée du maître." Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Sorel noted that the Christian Church had a morality. "This morality has become so deep-seated in us today that we imagine it to have been drawn out of our own being. This is not the case, as the corruption of the first century showed." Ibid., p. 11.

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not grasp its "ethical importance," and this was one of the more regrettable lapses in his doctrine, which prevented him from saying anything correct or rational about politics.¹⁴

We are in a better position than the Athenians, Sorel stated, to evaluate the errors of the Socratic philosophy. Yet those men who brought him to trial, distinguished the dangers which he brought to the city of Athens: "(They) . . . crurent en frappant Socrate, frapper tout les écoles philosophique, décourager les novateurs et faire revivre les idées des héros de Marathon."¹⁵

Since Socrates, the idea of the proper composition of the state had been in continual flux, and Sorel stated, as a result: "Nous passons d'un despotisme a l'autre,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 13. Sorel noted further his orientation toward the present as a motive for the study of Socrates: "I believe that the study of ancient philosophical theories must not be confined to a simple labor of erudition. It is of sufficiently little interest to know what the Sophists and the predecessors of Socrates thought. Their theses have long since disappeared. It is not the same with ideas of Socrates. . . . All contemporary questions have their origin in his teaching. The methods which he inaugurated are still those which must occupy the educated today." Ibid., p. 14. ". . . believed that in knocking Socrates, they knocked all the philosophical schools, discouraged innovators and made the ideas of the heroes of Marathon relive."

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sans que nous puissions voir de terme à nos maux."¹⁶ In addition, Socrates scorned the physicists of his day and taught his followers not to bother with science. Instead he proposed "une conception artistique du monde de manière à débarrasser la science du Bavardage pédant des cosmogonistes."¹⁷ The ethics of Socrates included numerous contradictions and could therefore not endure, but Socrates had furnished the dialectician an " . . . arsenal inépuisable pour ruiner toutes les fausses morales."¹⁸

From this beginning Georges Sorel proceeded to an examination of the trial of Socrates and especially to a consideration of the accusations against him in the areas of morals, politics and religion. It is clear that Sorel assumed the role of prosecutor and judge, yet his deep respect for Socrates is equally clear:

Nous n'aurions pas donné une idée assez élevée de l'enseignement de notre philosophe, si nous n'avions pas fait connaître l'importance de la dialectique dans l'étude des causes. Nous espérons que nos

¹⁶Ibid., p. 14. "We pass from one despotism to another without being able to see the end of our evils."

¹⁷Ibid., p. 15. "An artistic conception of the world in a manner to rid science of the pedantic chatter of the cosmogonists."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17. " . . . inexhaustible arsenal to ruin all false moralities."

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lecteurs reconnaîtront, avec nous, qu'on peut pardonner à Socrate bien des erreurs, par reconnaissance des services qu'il a rendus à la science.¹⁹

A final remark in the preface suggests Sorel's posture with respect to the study of Socrates and its bearing on contemporary life: "Nous serions heureux si nous parvenions à ranimer dans quelques âmes le feu sacré des études philosophique et à convaincre quelques personnes des dangers que court notre civilisation, par suite de l'indifférence en matière de moral et de droit."²⁰

The opening chapter of The Trial of Socrates called upon the testimony of the Greek poet-comedien Aristophanes and was entitled "The Witness of Aristophanes."²¹ According to Sorel, the great poet was the first to dare attack the Socratics. Here his interpretation differed with those of his contemporaries who

¹⁹Ibid., p. 20.

We would not have given a well enough raised idea of the teaching of our philosophy, if we had not made known the importance of the dialectic in the study of causes. We hope that our readers will recognize with us that one can pardon Socrates for his errors, by recognizing the services that he rendered to science.

²⁰Ibid., p. 21. "We would be happy if we succeeded in reanimating in some souls the sacred fire of philosophical studies and to convince some people of the dangers that our civilization runs, consequently of the indifference in material of morality and law."

²¹Georges Goriely, le Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Riviere et Cie, 1962). On page 32 M. Goriely estimated this chapter to be the most brilliant of the book.

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argued that the comedies exercised an evil and degenerating influence on the Athenian mind. Some claimed, Sorel noted, that if there ever was an Athenian who no longer believed in the gods of Greece it was Aristophanes, because of the bitter and ridiculing way he treated them. But Sorel questioned these judgments. He preferred to see comedy as the "war of literature and eloquence in the name of the good old times of ignorance when the Athenian mariner knew only how to ask for barley cake and cry ho! ho!"²² For Sorel the representation of moral depravity was a consequence of the intellectual progress of the epoch.

The comedies had shown that Aristophanes preferred the old Athens in spite of its vices to the new, which for him had ceased to be purely Hellenic. Aristophanes was an enemy both of the demagogues and the new oligarchy. Quoting from The Birds, Sorel identified Aristophanes as chiding the new philosophy: ". . . weak mortals attached to the earth, creatures of clay . . . unfortunate race whose life is only darkness, listen: we who are to be immortal, airy, always young, always occupied with eternal ideas, we will teach you all the celestial things."²³ Sorel discovered numerous examples of ironic

²²Ibid., p. 23.

²³Ibid., p. 35. Sorel's reference: Les Oiseaux, v. 685.

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deprecation directed at the Sophists and Socrates in particular by the mordant comedian. In The Clouds, for example, Socrates was made to appear suspended in a basket while explaining that he needed to remain suspended in the air to find the truth, and that contact with the earth would prevent him from rising to lofty conceptions.²⁴ The new Socratic school called for new laws, which Sorel saw as a transvaluation of Athenian morality with destructive consequences: "All that which is shameful on the earth and condemned by the law is honorable with the birds."²⁵

Sorel then demonstrated that Aristophanes had denounced in his plays the incredulity of the new philosophical schools and he proceeded to a comparison of the old and new generations.

The old generation had been raised into an admiration for the old Hellenic heroes. Homer and Aschylus had sung of the combats of these marvelous men and the gods of Olympus. They believed that this form of education was essential to the formation of good citizens. The Sophists changed all that. The people who had not learned the new teaching were regarded as foolish.²⁶

The result of this change was a disaster for Athens:

"In the new Athens, the country gentleman, the old

²⁴Ibid., p. 36. Sorel's reference: Nuées v. 223.

²⁵Ibid., p. 37. Sorel's reference: Les Oiseaux, v. 755.

²⁶Ibid., p. 41.

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soldier, was inferior to the lofty Sophists, because he could not engage in discourse, because he could not conduct a trial."²⁷ Sorel, perhaps casting an eye towards the rhetorically inclined French Parliament, complained of the new order in bitter terms:

In an assembly of idle and talkative people an eloquent and subtle advocate always gets the better of an old soldier. Here is why ancient civilization, heroic and religious surrendered.²⁸

Thus Sorel concluded Aristophanes' comedy The Birds was ". . . une satire des plus virulent et des plus amusantes contre les nouvelles écoles philosophique."²⁹

Socrates had rendered a great service to philosophy by creating precise definitions, but from this had derived the need to discuss the meaning of each word and thus to enter often into grammatical subtleties. This was, in Sorel's view, precisely the side of Socrates which Aristophanes attacked. The Greek mind was too much inclined to discussions of words, Sorel concluded.³⁰ To read the dialogs of Plato, he stated, would show how very often

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 42. ". . . a most virulent and amusing satire against the new philosophical schools."

³⁰In an interesting footnote Sorel expanded on the dangers of the dialectic: ". . . le danger de la dialectique est la confusion qui s'établit très facilement entre les genres simples et naturels et les genres complexes et artificiels: La distinction à poser entre ces deux classes de résultats n'a pu être bien faire par les anciens, c'est pourquoi ils ne purent, en général arriver à découvrir les lois de la nature." Ibid., p. 66.

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Plato wins over his adversaries by encumbering them in a labyrinth of words.

But these were superficial problems compared to what Georges Sorel considered the central evil of Greek society: slavery; a vice which he found to have been encouraged and rationalized by the new schools of philosophy.³¹ Slavery, which Sorel referred to as " . . . cette institution diabolique," would destroy " . . . toute société qui la pratique."³² Slavery corrupted all, he wrote, and " . . . the master more than the slave."³³ Nevertheless, slavery was " . . . regardé par les philosophes anciens comme essential à une société policée, parce qu'il dispensait du travail."³⁴ This concept of an ideal society based on virtue strengthened, among the thinkers, the thesis of slavery.³⁵ To the free men

³¹Ibid., p. 83.

³²Ibid. " . . . this diabolical institution would destroy every society which practiced it."

³³Ibid., p. 84.

³⁴Ibid. " . . . regarded by ancient philosophers as essential in a policed society because it dispensed with work."

³⁵Here Sorel quoted Aristotle in an interesting statement on slavery, "Quand on est inférieur à ses semblables autant que le corps l'est à l'âme, la brute à l'homme, et c'est la condition de tous ceux chez qui l'emploi des forces corporelles est le seul et le meilleur parti à tirer de leur être, on est esclave par nature." Politique Livre I, Chapitre II traduction de M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, as quoted by Sorel.

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belonged the exercise of reason, to the slaves that of the body. This thesis, according to Sorel, was based on the principle of the absolute separation of the mind and the body, a doctrine which he believed Socrates had completely accepted.³⁶

Thus in the city of Athens, the citizens did not work much. And because of his conviction of the ethical value of work, Sorel believed, it would be easy to imagine the evil consequences to which this idle life led.³⁷

Social classes, on the Athenian model, which did not work were able to maintain themselves only by force, the result being an extreme demoralization in the dominant class. Sorel did not consider this to be a casual observation. He wrote: "Il en a été ainsi dans tous les siècles, et c'est là une loi de la nature humaine."³⁸

On the subject of the ethical value of work, Sorel was greatly influenced by Proudhon whom he believed had very well stated the problem:

Not only is work necessary to the conservation of our bodies, it is indispensable to the development of our minds. . . . As much as the law of consumption humiliates us, so much the law of work

³⁶Sorel, Socrate, p. 85.

³⁷Sorel saw the same conditions in contemporary society. "Aurourd'hui encore il suffit de regarder autour de nous pour reconnaître l'influence des même causes." Ibid.

³⁸Ibid. "It has been thus in all centuries, and it is a law of human nature."

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lifts us up. We do not live exclusively the life of the mind because we are not pure-mind, but by work we spiritualize more and more of our existence. Can we thus pity ourselves for it?³⁹

Sorel could find no one in antiquity who recognized the fundamental vice of slavery, but he boasted, Aristophanes had had the wisdom to rank the peasant above the sophist. From The Frogs he quoted the plea of the chorus: "Guard us from talking with Socrates, and from scorning the sublime nuances of the tragic muse; from passing an idle life debating emphatic declamations of subtle foolishness: this is to have lost all meaning."⁴⁰ This quotation is found in Chapter II of The Trail of Socrates entitled "The Socratic Morals" and signals the beginning of Georges Sorel's attack on what he believed the corrupting moral influence of Socrates.

It was in Socrates' distinction between two types of love that Sorel located the origins of morally disruptive and reprehensible influences on first the Greeks and especially Plato and enduring late into the nineteenth century. Pure love, Socrates taught, was that which addressed itself to the soul and was inspired in the

³⁹Quoted by Sorel: Proudhon, la guerre et la paix, livre Iv, chapitre VI in Socrate, p. 85.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 86, quoted by Sorel as Grenouilles, v. 1491.

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Socratic lexicon by Venus Uranie.⁴¹ One could give it free reign without danger. Theoretically one scorned Vénus Pandème as the representative of physical fulfillment. Sorel found in The Banquet by Xenophon a statement of Socrates' pernicious conception of love. Here Socrates had declared that it was admirable that a man love a handsome boy. He found it completely natural that the boys "sont célébrée et admirée comme s'il s'agissait d'une fille."⁴² Sorel added that Socrates counseled moderation, and did not approve that males embrace one another; he recognized " . . . the passionate character of the Greeks and understood the dangers of homosexual relations."⁴³ Plato's account of these events was entirely rejected by Sorel who preferred Xenophon and found Plato a morally degenerate, unscrupulous disciple of Socrates: "Nous ne consulterons pas le Banquet de Platon parce que nous pensons qu'il faut en laisser toute responsabilité à l'auteur, qui nous semble avoir été beaucoup moins chaste

⁴¹Grudgingly Sorel allowed " . . . nous conformerons à l'usage, et nous appellerons . . . l'âme' la substance supérieur; cependant, à notre avis, ce mot peut donner souvent lien à des confusions." Sorel, Socrate, p. 87.

⁴²Sorel, Socrate, p. 88. " . . . are celebrated and admired as if he were a girl."

⁴³Ibid.

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que Xénophon."⁴⁴ According to Sorel, Plato must have written The Banquet in "Sicily where the morals were very corrupt."⁴⁵

The theories of Socrates also removed men from their homes, for it was not with a woman that an Athenian could consummate the union of souls so vaunted by Socrates. Sorel concluded: "L'amour que personifie la Vénus Uranie est nécessairement unisexuel. Socrate commit un véritable crime en donnant au monde une théorie si parfaite et si poétique de l'amour unisexuel."⁴⁶ Thus the ancients came to scorn conjugal love and with it all physical relations with women, and gradually fell into an "oriental mysticism."⁴⁷

Erotic mysticism was not in the pure Greek mind, Sorel affirmed, it was the Orient which had at all times

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 93. In a footnote, Sorel stated: "Platon expose complaisamment ses theses sodomitiques; l'auteur lui fait célébrer l'amour unisexuel comme une chose tres honnête." Ibid. "We do not consult the Banquet of Plato because we think it necessary to leave all responsibility to the author, who seems to us to have been much less chaste than Xenophon."

⁴⁵Sorel, Socrate, p. 93.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 95. "Love that Venus and Uranus personified is necessarily unisexual. Socrates committed a real crime in giving to the world a theory so perfect and so poetic of unisexual love."

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 99.

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inspired it. It was a product of the influence of Asiatic religions and of a certain overworked intellect which led to hysteria. It seemed clear to Sorel that Socrates borrowed principles long honored on the other side of the Aegean Sea; and Plato had simply exaggerated the faults of his teacher.⁴⁸ Therefore, Socratism proved to be deadly: it contributed powerfully to vulgarization and to the development of an unhealthy and erotic culture.⁴⁹

In Chapter III entitled "The Religion of Socrates" Sorel considered the complaints launched against Socrates on the question of religion. He found that Socrates seemed above reproach in that he regularly sacrificed to the gods, participated in all the feasts and showed himself, if not zealous, at least decent. The Greeks, Sorel noted, were imbued with a deep respect for ancient traditions; they had an almost superstitious admiration for Homer.⁵⁰

Yet Socrates believed himself to be inspired by Divinity, and his disciples had the same opinion.⁵¹ Socrates believed that he possessed an oracle which gave

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 100. Sorel complained in a footnote that "philosophy is not to blame for the play of the imagination, but philosophers should combat their influence, as Socrates did not." Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 106-08.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 127.

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him spontaneous, precise and unfailing counsel. As a result, Socrates found himself in a position very different from that of the Sophists: he was not only a profound dialectician and an eloquent professor, " . . . il était prophète, il était inspiré par la Divinité; la vérité était incarnée en lui; ses décisions étaient infaillibles."⁵² Socrates had a religious mission. Was it this mission which accounted for the accusation against Socrates that he sought to overthrow the national religion and to replace it with demonic superstitions? In the opinion of Georges Sorel: "Socrate ne craignait rien tant que de manquer aux devoirs que les Dieux lui imposaient. Sa conduite était marquée au sceau du fanatisme doctrinal."⁵³ It was a consequence of his mission that Socrates refused to accept payment for his teaching. He believed his teachings had to be freely dispensed, for the good was an object of science which could be taught; that which he had received as a revelation must not command payment from others. Sorel concluded:

⁵²Ibid., p. 129. Sorel noted: "En Asie, cette situation n'aurait rien de choquant, il y avait eu, de tout temps, des prophètes dans ce pays; mais en Grèce il en était tout autrement. Ibid. " . . . he was a prophet, he was inspired by Divinity; the truth was embodied in him; his decisions were infallible."

⁵³Sorel, Socrate, p. 135. "Socrates feared nothing so much as missing the duties that the gods had imposed on him. His conduct was marked by the seal of doctrinal fanaticism."

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Socrates regarded the stars as divine beings and addressed prayers to the sun. Socrates felt that the astrological theories of his time would lead to nothing because these divine beings were beyond the science of man.⁵⁶

Sorel again complained of the influence of Asia upon Greece, an influence which he felt had marked to some extent the Socratic teaching--an influence which was morally detrimental to the Hellenic mind. All that was known about the morals of the populations of ancient Asia, he said, was unfavorable, and seemed to derive from the religious systems and those who practiced them. Castration, sacred prostitution, the pederasty of the priests he noted were common things in these religions.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 136. "That is a purely religious doctrine."

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 137. "The philosopher must not be confused with a simple master of morality or eloquence. He seems like a hierophant and revealer."

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 142. Sorel observed with respect to man's propensity to believe the incredible: "D'après une loi de notre nature, nous voulons quelque chose d'indémontrable à croire. Le 'Credo quia absurdum' appartient à toutes les époques et à toutes civilisations."
Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁷Sorel, Socrate, p. 152.

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Jewish religion escaped these demoralizing influences because "it was," Sorel believed, "essentially virile."⁵⁸

In Chapter IV entitled "The Oligarchs" Sorel discussed comparatively the aristocracy of Greece before Socrates and that which came to influence during and after his time. The old aristocracy of Greece was centered on military institutions. There was very little distance between the soldier and the officer. Tactics were developed through practice. The school of command was based on obedience. Each city had its own armament and its manner of combat. The principle occupation was agriculture. The people were frugal and sober.⁵⁹ They were soldiers whose existence was tied to the glory of the city. Their education had been a preparation for war; it was not complex and thus it was accessible to all the citizens. The development of the schools of the Sophists completely changed this situation. A new aristocracy-- an aristocracy of the word and of intelligence slowly came into being. It was this development which Aristophanes so often attacked.

The Greeks, Sorel said, were endowed with an intelligence so alive and a genius so free that the men

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Sorel noted here: "These citizens were not merchants demanding guaranteed exchanges, protection for their industries or soliciting governmental favors, they were superior to our present day bourgeoisie." Ibid., p. 172.

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of the city, under the influence of the new schools, soon showed themselves very superior to the country gentlemen (campagnards). The old soldiers of Marathon, Sorel charged, were exposed to ruinous trials because they were incapable of advancing their arguments with the finesse of the city dwellers.⁶⁰ The lower ranks of the urban plebs raised themselves by the oratorical skills which ruled the city.

The Sophists taught the art of debate. The evil in their doctrine was its unprincipled and amoral goal-- success. To succeed by domogogic flattery in a democratic society or by more refined flattery in the court of a tyrant such were the goals that the students were taught to pursue. They were " . . . donc complètement indifférent aux principes des divers gouvernements: ils apprenaient à se tirer d'affaire dans toutes les conditions possibles."⁶¹ To persuade without regard for any moral end, Sorel concluded, was the prostitution of eloquence, logic and knowledge.⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 177.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 178. In a footnote to this complaint Sorel stated "Dans le Gorgias, le sophiste explique que son art met en état de persuader les juges, les sénateurs, le peuple. Il est très clairement avoué que la rhétorique n'a d'autre but que la persuasion." Ibid. " . . . thus completely indifferent to the principles of diverse governments: they learned to manage in all possible conditions."

⁶²Ibid.

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Yet from this point of view, Socrates had been different than the Sophists, because he sought to demonstrate the truth. But his disciples did not always follow him in all his teachings. And the demagogues did in fact become a sort of oligarchy based on the small shops and artisans of Athens: haughty, sly, lying and boastful, they directed the affairs of the city to the detriment of the country.⁶³

At this point in his narration, the question of inequality of talent seemed especially perplexing to Sorel. He referred to the discussions of the philosophers whom he called "utopian" and concluded that the founders of utopias usually made talent an important attribute, though he chided them by suggesting that they ". . . agissaient ainsi, en partie, pour se réserver une belle prébend dans la société réorganisée."⁶⁴

What of the problem of reconciling very great superiorities? Sorel noted the opinion of Aristotle who had written: "It would be ridiculous to try to submit them to the constitution because they would respond as the

⁶³Ibid., p. 179. In reference to his contemporary France, Sorel noted, ". . . today people are disposed to admit the legitimacy of an hierarchy of knowledge. But the modern socialist knows that equality is only a misleading lie in a society of unequal cultural opportunity." Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 194. ". . . acted thus, in part, to reserve for themselves a good cushy job in the reorganized society."

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lions would to a decree rendered by an assembly of rabbits on the general equality of animals."⁶⁵ Aristotle had proclaimed the absolute right of genius: "It is equitable neither to murder nor to punish by ostracism such a person, nor to submit him to the common level . . . it remains therefore to obey this man and to recognize in him a perpetual power."⁶⁶ This proposition was rejected by Sorel in favor of a statement of political right which he found in the writings of Taine:

La chose commune est à la communauté passée, présente et futur. Chaque génération n'est que la gérante temporaire et la dépositaire responsable d'un patrimoine précieux et glorieux qu'elle a reçu de la précédente à charge de le transmettre à la suivante. . . . La constitution n'est qu'une machine. . . . La plus savante est illégitime, là ou elle dissout l'Etat. Il n'y en a pas qui soit de droit antérieur, universel et absolu.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Sorel quoted Aristotle, Politique, livre III, chapitre VIII.

⁶⁶Ibid.; livre III, chapitre XI. Sorel complained of this advice in the same footnote, "Inutile de remarquer le vice de ce raisonnement qui néglige complètement l'histoire." Sorel, Socrate, p. 197.

⁶⁷Sorel quoted from Taine, La Révolution, Tome I p. 187, p. 197.

The common thing is the community past, present and future. Each generation is only the temporary manager and the responsible trustee of a precious and glorious patrimony that it has received from the preceding generation in charge of transmitting it to the following. The constitution is only a machine. The most knowledgeable is illegitimate, or it dissolves the State. There is none of it which is anterior, universal and absolute right.

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For the new philosophical schools in Greece, Sorel suggested, there seemed to be a motive for justifying the special privilege of the superior person. Certainly the philosophers themselves could benefit from it, and when this claim was extended to the talented a new oligarchic principle was posed. The metaphysical conceptions to which Socratism was attached, Sorel said, were conducive to the development of still more consequences of this doctrine of privilege. Although Socrates was an exceptional man, Sorel wrote, nevertheless he claimed that equal abilities could be acquired by pious and wise men through exercise and study.⁶⁸ This conception divided the ancient Greek city into two categories of citizens. Those who participated in an elevated intelligence enjoyed a sort of grace;⁶⁹ they were evidently better equipped to discover the truth. They could, better than the others, analyze phenomena and formulate natural laws which the Divinity had written in nature. But the government of the cities did not always follow the theoretical guidelines submitted by philosophers. "Le plus souvent, ceux qui possèdent la puissance de la pensée et de la volonté, nécessaire à l'administration

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁹ This word received special attention from Sorel who associated it with the Greek idea of "l'Intellect divin." See Socrate, p. 198.

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des États, sont laissés de côté."⁷⁰ And in this circumstance the Socratic thesis became almost subversive if not revolutionary.

The dialectical ladder was raised to new heights. By ignoring the savants, by refusing them their privileges it could be assumed that democracy not only made a mistake it committed a crime against the Divinity. It had overthrown " . . . toutes les lois de la Providence, elle se met elle même hors le droit."⁷¹ Those who had been prevented from assuming their rightful places in government now had a mission to accomplish. Genius and talent had duties to fulfill. They could not allow themselves to cross their arms and laugh at the stupidity of fools. They were " . . . nés pour l'action, ils doivent agir."⁷²

In this regard Socrates had given very clear advice. He had said that: " . . . if one were capable of winning the crown and of rendering glory upon himself and his birthplace, and yet he refused to fight, it is

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 199. "The most often, those who possess the power of thought and will necessary for the administration of States are left aside."

⁷¹Ibid. " . . . all laws of Providence, it put itself even outside of right."

⁷²Ibid. " . . . born for action, they must act."

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clear that he would be a sissy and a coward."⁷³ Socrates posed the following questions: Could a government founded on the domination of the ignorant over the wise call itself legitimate? Was it not in this case a social ulcer which must be cured by fire and iron? Was not the right superior to a legality purely of form? Are not the good called upon to sacrifice their lives to combat evil and to rehabilitate the divine order when obstacles exist to its pacific realization?⁷⁴ These questions, Sorel said, conformed to the principles of the Socratic system. They were the logical consequences of his teaching.

Can philosophic doctrines be blamed for revolutionary movements, Sorel asked? It is doubtless, he answered, that economic conditions play an important role, but it would be a serious error to ignore the study of the impact of ideas on revolutionary change. In fact, ". . . aucun mouvement important ne peut se produire dans la société sans une Idée."⁷⁵ Thus one must demand an accounting of the philosophers such as Socrates for the impact of their doctrines. This had been done by all

⁷³Ibid., p. 200. Sorel quoted Socrate, Mémoires, livre III, chapitre VII.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 203. ". . . no important movement can produce itself in a society without an Idea."

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the historians who condemned the evil influence of the Sophists and their contribution to the unhappiness of Athens.

It is striking to note, Sorel continued, how rare it is that thinkers become involved actively in political life. Their timidity contrasted dramatically with the bold radicalism of their thought. Men who resort to violence, Sorel said, were the weakest of theoreticians.⁷⁶ It is of no consequence that the theoretician might protest against the extremism of their disciples he concluded. One would respond to them that a book is to be read and commented upon and that it was regrettable that the author had so badly explained himself.⁷⁷ The thinker must be held accountable.

Of all forms of government, Sorel continued, the worst was that in which the rich and the talented share power. Most historians, he charged, blinded by their prejudice against the nobility, had ignored the vices of plutocratic constitutions. In this type of government,

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 204. In support of this observation, Sorel referred to the revolutionary assemblies in France, a pejorative aside.

⁷⁷Ibid. Students of Sorel who have refused the validity of blaming the thinker for the actions of his followers have not expatiated upon this statement. See George Meizel, The Genesis of Georges Sorel.

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Sorel wrote, success justified everything.⁷⁸ The evil of plutocratic systems according to Sorel rested on the principle of exchange: men did not count. The dominance of economic ideas obscured the moral law and corrupted political principles. This was not the way the old Athenian democracy comprehended things: it seemed impossible to them, Sorel said, that one could become a good citizen without having received a virile education. This "virile education" Sorel compared to the Sophistic and Socratic studies which could make a savant out of an entirely unscrupulous person but it could not " . . . lui donner l'âme d'un homme libre."⁷⁹

The ancient Greeks, Sorel continued, gave an important place to Homer in their education. Homer was not admired as an artist but as an excellent teacher. It was through him that the Greeks were awakened to themselves, he was the center of the national conscience, the distinctive mark of the Greeks. The works of Homer bound the Greek present to its past. The morals of the epic of the Greek kings were celebrated with enthusiasm,

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 210. In a footnote, Sorel quoted Renan who wrote, "The Roman Empire by deprecating the nobility . . . augmented instead the advantages of chance. Far from establishing effective equality among the citizens, the Roman Empire created profound differences: the notable and the rich, and the poor. By proclaiming political equality for all, inequality was introduced into the law." Sorel quoted Renan Marc-Aurèle, p. 598.

⁷⁹Sorel, Socrate, p. 212. " . . . give to him the soul of a free man."

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and this sentiment survived even into the Greek democratic era. Eschylus, Sorel believed, was hardly less conservative than Homer, but he lived in a revolutionary age, and in that age he entered a plea for the cause of the old morals. But the innovators scorned the old poets. And the Socratic philosophers shared this point of view.⁸⁰

Why did the new schools move away from the study of the ancient poems? They were offended, said Sorel, by the manner in which the questions were presented. They found absurd the naive anthropomorphism of Homer. The Socratic idea of providence was almost the exact opposite of the passionate gods of ancient Greece.⁸¹ But an even more profound difference between the old and the new culture, Sorel identified as the essence of melancholy--fonds de tristesse.⁸² This characterized the ancient Greeks who in the midst of their most brilliant triumphs recalled that one must fear a reversal of fortune. This was the concern of Agamemnon who turned away from the glory of victory to conclude that " . . . He is only happy who passes his life to its end in an untroubled prosperity. If thus in the future I may hope to emerge

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 213.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 216. "base of sadness."

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as triumphant as today."⁸³ Nothing is more touching, said Sorel, than this sentiment of moderation, so purely Hellenic. The Greek poets wanted their heroes to implore the gods not to make them pay for a victory with a future disaster.⁸⁴ The Greek poet did not know the false pessimism of disappointed pride: "Si le malheur est toujours prêt à nous frapper, si le bonheur complet est une illusion décevante, le monde n'en est pas moins aussi excellent et aussi parfait que possible."⁸⁵ No people, Sorel believed, had so strongly sensed the grandeur and the beauty of life as the Greeks. He especially vaunted their great love of activity. Greek heroes loved life and nature was entirely animated by their genius; a genius which was bound to the earth.

The poetic melancholy of the Greek poets was best represented for Sorel in Aristophanes' The Persians which he called a master work of dramatic art. In this play the soldier poet was depicted as never abandoning himself to exaggerations of chauvinism. Before each campaign he celebrated the victory of Salamis; but with never a bitter word for the victors, for he had learned to respect his

⁸³Sorel quoted Eschyle, Agamemnon, v. 928.

⁸⁴Sorel, Socrate, p. 217.

⁸⁵Ibid. "If unhappiness is always ready to strike us, if happiness is a deceiving illusion, the world is not less excellent and perfect than possible."

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adversary. He knew that everything was controlled by the gods. Had they not punished the pride of Xerxes? No Persian poet, said Sorel, had painted with so much grandeur and profound sorrow the misfortunes of the prince.

But the Sophists were optimists. And Socrates shared their optimism. The poetic melancholy of the ancients was thought to be an injury to science: had not intelligence been given to man to lift himself above the miseries of the world? Was not intelligence sovereign? In this perspective Sorel saw an implicit decadence. "The man who contents himself with probablism," he wrote, "the person who believes in the absolute independence of reason has no cause to accept pessimism. He lets things go, does his task as well as he can and encloses himself in a safe and warm retreat. And if he has attained a sufficient degree of optimism," Sorel continued, "he will regard the unfolding panorama of the world as an interesting tableau and will end by believing that everything was made to amuse him."⁸⁶

Thus two things were especially offensive to the Patriotic and honest part of the Athenian population with respect to Socrates, Sorel concluded in a final chapter

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 219. Sorel noted: "We think the optimistic period in France is tending towards its end: the awakening of pessimism in certain milieux seems to announce the revival of morality. For a sufficiently longtime the cult of success has dominated among us; the time has come to see life in a more philosophical way."
Ibid.

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entitled "The Death of Socrates." First, were the claims of Socrates to prophetic inspiration, and secondly his advocacy of a withdrawal from life as contained in his doctrine of renunciation. Socrates encouraged the moral decline in Athenian life through the doctrine of love which he taught. Unhealthy morals, Sorel said, were " . . . se développaient déjà assez vite sans que le philosophe vînt en donner une théorie aussi poétique, aussi séduisante et aussi perfidement dangereuse."⁸⁷

On the subject of education Socrates, like all the Sophists, worked to ruin the ancient morality. The conservatives were dismayed by this because they believed that heroic generations could only be formed by nourishing the young on the heroic poems. And after the disasters of the civil war, Sorel stated, all sensible men came to share this point of view. The choice seemed to be between the restoration of the old or the complete destruction of Greek civilization. Had not Socrates, himself, Sorel asked, admitted the necessity of the restoration by advising the sons of Pericles that they must take up once more the morals of their ancestors?⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 234. " . . . already developing themselves quickly enough without the philosopher coming to give a theory as poetic, seductive and treacherously dangerous."

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

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Ancient Greek society, Sorel reaffirmed, was founded upon the requisite military discipline which the preparation for war required. Among the unarmed soldiers a kind of equality had been engendered, an equality which was itself based on the condition of being a soldier-citizen. These soldier-citizens formed the government. But, Sorel complained, Socrates claimed that legitimate government belonged to the savants.⁸⁹ And the tyranny of the union between the intellectuals and the talented, Sorel believed, had fostered the amoral opportunism of the sophist ethic and the demise of the ancient bonds which held the old civilization together. In periods of calm, Sorel continued, people had admired the utopian ideas of the sophists: what happiness might they hope to discover if their assemblies could be composed, not of old marines and warriors, but of dialecticians.⁹⁰ In these conditions, the natural laws of government could be found and correct decisions could be made. But, Sorel affirmed, the new oligarchy ruined the city, oppressed all the citizens and united all the honorable men against it in a sentiment of reprobation. And for most of the people Socrates symbolized this new point of view.

The Athenians had passed through the harsh and humiliating experience of war and privation. The future

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 240.

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seemed gloomy; the city was poor. It was necessary, Sorel wrote, to appeal to the sentiments of heroism of the peasants, merchants and planters, who knew little of philosophy but who recalled that their fathers had been heroes during the Persian Wars. Because, Sorel continued, people have need of a symbol to reify their ideas, Socrates came to symbolize the new and unhappy education.⁹¹ Socrates had vaunted his superiority over his contemporaries saying: "I say that the voice of a god has given understanding to me."⁹² Sorel also found that Socrates made it known that an oracle had declared him the most wise of men.⁹³ Could this impiety have escaped the judges who condemned Socrates to death?

It was in death that Socrates, Sorel believed, reached his true stature as a Greek, and to some extent

⁹¹Ibid., p. 250.

⁹²Ibid., p. 257. Sorel stated his strong preference for Xenophon over Plato as a source for the life of Socrates in the following interesting statement: "Xenophon had been a soldier, his soul was better tempered than that of Plato who had a delicate nature. . . . Xenophon had seen death up close. He knew to what heights the soul was raised when man voluntarily exposed himself to danger." And again quoting Proudhon, la Guerre et la paix, he lists the following excerpt: "It is especially by the exaltation of the virile person that war shows its prestige. Man under arms appears greater than nature; he feels himself more worthy, more proud, more sensible to honor, more capable of virtue and of self sacrifice." Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., p. 274.

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separated himself from the other less noble philosophers of his time. Once again acknowledging Proudhon, Sorel observed that death was the decisive proof of the value of education and the morality of a society. Because Socrates had died in such a noble fashion recognizing that the destiny of man should be to spend himself entirely for his natural and spiritual progeny, why, Sorel asked, had no religion come out of his teaching? Socrates was perfectly gifted as a religious founder: enthusiastic, eloquent, and apparently superior to other religious prophets. Yet why had no religion ensued? The milieu was decisive, Sorel concluded. Because the old traditions were not broken a new religion could not impose itself. In order for the local divinities to be dethroned, it was necessary, Sorel concluded, for the Roman conquest to splinter the ideas of patriotic solidarity and to level conditions generally.⁹⁴

But the great weakness of the Socratic schools, Sorel found, was their optimism: the masses could not, he believed, be roused by praising the order, harmony and rationality of existing things. All great religious movements, he concluded, were based on a pessimistic conception of life.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 277.

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Also Socrates was not a man to create symbols which are important in the religious systems of a people.⁹⁵ Socrates conceived of a purely intellectual being, Sorel wrote, and his ethics rested upon this untenable hypothesis.⁹⁶ Thus the Socratic theory was anti-scientific in the highest degree: it was supernatural.⁹⁷ It omitted the motive causes which formed a most obscure and vital area of philosophy.⁹⁸ Fortunately, Sorel observed, in the contemporary world the problem of motive causes had been studied by a new, fecund method which was based on observation and classification. The moral sciences, he noted, were not

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 278. Sorel also mentioned here his idea that the old Greek polytheism could not be reinvigorated through a scientific explanation of its myths, because these "drew their force from the freedom with which they had been formed in the national poetry. To reconcile them was impossible. To explain them by allegory or by history would destroy them." Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 294. "This is why, Sorel observed, Aristotle reproached Socrates: for not taking account of the principle of action." Ibid., p. 295.

⁹⁷Sorel introduced his definition of religion here as "A collection of dogma, accepted by popular faith, which defines the supernatural role of man in the world." Ibid., p. 298.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 314.

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absolute. Motive causes depended on history.⁹⁹ Nothing is perfectly logical in society, he concluded.¹⁰⁰

On this important idea Sorel terminated his work The Trial of Socrates,¹⁰¹ and opened his career as a speculative writer--a career which has thus far resisted all efforts of categorization and which has in addition caused a flow of pejorative comments concerning his style as a writer.

"Georges Sorel is one of the most provocative and baffling figures in modern thought," wrote Richard Humphrey in 1951. "It is strange that his reputation should be so great, and in another sense, strange too, that it should not be greater."¹⁰²

Sorel himself writing in a letter to his friend Daniel Halevy, which was to become the introduction to his Reflections on Violence, stated what he felt to be the core of the problem of the writer:

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 330.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 346. Sorel termed Plato's myths in The Republic, "phenomenological essays on the creations of reason." Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁰²Richard Humphrey, Georges Sorel Prophet Without Honor, A Study in Anti-Intellectualism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 1. Note: Humphrey stated Sorel ". . . married a girl of peasant stock"; an error corrected later by Pierre Andreu in Notre maitre M. Sorel.

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The communication of thought is always very difficult for anyone who has strong metaphysical preoccupations; the words themselves somehow spoil the most important thoughts. Verbal communication is easier than written, because spoken words act on the feelings in a mysterious way which helps to establish a current of sympathy between people.¹⁰³

If Sorel had difficulty as a writer, his conversational powers were reputed to have been prodigious.

Georges Valois in 1921 recalled that:

. . . lorsque Sorel entrait, il y avait un frémissement de l'intelligence chez tous les assistants et l'on se taisait. Nous écoutons, ce n'étaient pas ses cinquante ans qui nous tenaient en respect, c'était sa parole. Sorel pouvait parler pendant des heures sans que l'on songeât à l'interrompre.¹⁰⁴

This opinion is confirmed by R. Johannet who drew the following ironic comparison:

Comme beaucoup de grands esprits, comme Socrate qu'il abomine, cest par la parole que M. Sorel a exercé le plus d'influence. . . . Oui, c'est par la conversation, et son oeuvre c'est de parler, c'est de parler de tout, de tout, de mathématiques, d'exégèse, de la C.G.T., des épicuriens, de Dreyfus, du sweating-système, de

¹⁰³ Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence, trans. by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 33-34. (Hereinafter referred to as Reflections.)

¹⁰⁴ Georges Valois, D'un siècle à l'autre (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1921), p. 134.

. . . when Sorel entered there was rustling of intelligence among all the assistants and we kept quiet. We listened, it was not his fifty years which held our respect, it was his word. Sorel could talk for hours without anyone dreaming to interrupt him.

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Bergson, de Byron, de Léon XIII, du Caillou Michaux, de Dante, de Barthou, de Péricles, d'en parler avec précision, avec tenue, avec sagesse, avec brio, je dirais avec originalité, si ce mot d'originalité n'était cent fois trop pâle, comme s'il les avait tous inventés, créés, mis au monde et nourris.¹⁰⁵

Jean Variot quoted Sorel as having compared himself to Cézanne, saying:

Je n'aime pas non plus ma manière d'écrire. Je ne peux pas arriver, depuis tant d'années que j'écris, à acquérir cette habileté si utile que Cézanne ne peut pas acquérir non plus. . . . Je sens chez lui ce que je sens chez moi: l'homme qui cherche l'art parfait de s'exprimer et qui n'arrive qu'à un imparfait.¹⁰⁶

Sorel came to recognize that his manner might restrict his readership. He wrote:

The defects of my manner of writing will prevent me from getting access to a wide public, but I think that I must be content with the place that nature and circumstance has assigned me. . . . And mine is not the worst lot because I am not in danger of becoming my own disciple as has so often happened

¹⁰⁵R. Johannet, *Itinéraires d'Intellectuels* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1921), pp. 178-80. Note: Has Johannet correctly stated Sorel's attitude toward Socrates here? Does a careful reading of The Trial of Socrates support the ". . . qui il abomine" assertion?

Like many great spirits, like Socrates that he abhorred it is by the word that M. Sorel exercised the most influence. . . . Yes, it is by conversation and his work is to talk, to talk of everything-- mathematics, exegesis, the C.G.T. [union] epicurians, Dreyfus, sweating-system, Bergson, Byron, Leon XIII, Caillou Michaux, Dante, Barthou, Pericles, of talking with precision, with behavior, with wisdom, with vigour, I would say with originality if this word originality were not 100 times too pale, as if he had invented, created, put into the world and nourished them all.

¹⁰⁶Jean Variot, Propos de Georges Sorel (4th éd.; Paris: 1935), p. 172.

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to those thinkers who have attempted to give perfect symmetrical form to their intuitions. . . . It is my ambition to be able to stir up personal research; to awaken the fire from the aches of ready made doctrines, to liberate the spirit of invention in my readers. For me this is better than to repeat formulas and to enslave the mind in the disputes of dogmatic disciples.¹⁰⁷

I don't like, either, my manner of writing. I can't succeed, during the many years that I write, to acquire this useful ability that Cezanne cannot acquire either. . . . I feel with him as I feel with me: the man who searches for the perfect art to express himself and only reaches the imperfect.

¹⁰⁷Sorel, Reflections, pp. 34-35.

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Part 3

Le Socrate du Quartier latin:
1892 - 1894

By 1892, Georges Sorel was settled in his petite villa of Boulogne-sur-Seine. Two or three times a week he crossed the Bois de Boulogne on his way to the Bibliothèque nationale, or to attend the lectures of Henri Bergson then underway at the Collège de France. Often he would visit the Société de philosophie, or Peguy's bookstore or that of a militant syndicalist named Delesalle. Sorel, always in the company of young students, quickly became known to those around the Collège de France and la Sorbonne as "le Socrate du Quartier latin."¹ Writing as one who first encountered Sorel at this time, Daniel Halévy recalled that he and his friends in the circle around Peguy

. . . étions très mal renseignés sur le passé de ce bizarre nouveau Socrate qui nous était tombé des cieux sur la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève. Nous savions de manière imprécise que Sorel avait été ingénieur des Ponts-et-Chaussées en diverses régions méditerranéennes, et nous aimions qu'il occupât ses années de loisir à nous donner l'exemple d'un étudiant volontaire qui choisissait ses maîtres et ignorait les préparations d'examen.²

¹ Georges Goriely, Le Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie., 1962), p. 56. (Hereinafter referred to as Le Pluralisme.)

² Pierre Andreu, Notre Maître M. Sorel, preface de Daniel Halévy (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1953), pp. 13-14.

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In 1892, Sorel published an article on Proudhon, "Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon." In 1893, he associated himself with a group of young radicals who had recently discovered Marxism, among whom was a Rumanian named Diamandy " . . . le marxiste le plus confit en raisons incessamment absorbé par les soins d'une apolo-gétique frémissante."³ It was Diamandy who founded the review called L'Ere nouvelle to which Sorel contributed two important studies: la Fin du paganisme and L'ancienne et la nouvelle Métaphysique in 1894.⁴

Essai Sur La Philosophie De Proudhon

Sorel's "Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon" appeared in June 1892 in la Revue philosophique de la

. . . were very badly informed on the past of this bizarre Socrates who had fallen to us from the skies on the mountain Sainte-Genevieve. We knew in an imprecise manner that Sorel had been an engineer of Bridges and Roadways in diverse Mediterranean regions and we liked that he occupied his years of leisure to give us the example of a voluntary student who chose his masters and ignored the preparations of exams.

³Goriely, Le Pluralisme, p. 56. See also Anatole de Monzie L'entrée au Forum, p. 43. " . . . the marxist the most steeped in reason incessantly absorbed by the cares of an apologetic quivering."

⁴"la Fin du paganisme" was published in book form in 1901, under the title: la Ruine du monde antique, Conception matérialiste de l'histoire, and "l'ancienne et la nouvelle métaphysique" was published in book form in 1935 under the title: D'Aristotle à Marx.

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France et de l'étranger,⁵ the concluding part of which appeared in the same publication in the July 1892 issue. There are several references in this study to what Sorel found to be the close, though perhaps unconscious relationship between Proudhon and the ancient Greeks: ". . . il faut observer la liaison étroite, qui existe entre l'esprit de Proudhon et le génie grec: cette parenté est si forte que, d'ordinaire, notre auteur ne s'aperçoit pas de ses réminiscences et qu'il reproduit presque textuellement des théories empruntées à l'antiquité."⁶ And showing his continuing interest in the influence of Greek civilization, Sorel asked: "Where has our civilization drawn that which is best in our minds? The contact with Hellenic genius has given our thinking an entirely distinctive shape which we are no longer able to abandon."⁷ And the

⁵Félix Alcan, éditeur, Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger (Paris: Ancienne librairie Germer Baillière et Cie.). (Hereinafter referred to as Revue philosophique.)

⁶Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIV, 1892, p. 44. In a direct reference to his study of Socrates, Sorel remarked in a footnote: "C'est le résultat auquel nous sommes arrivés, il y a quelques années, en étudiant Socrate; nous cherchions un génie moderne, qui comprit les thèses du vieux maître; il n'y a guère que Proudhon qui soit dans ce cas." Ibid. ". . . it is necessary to observe the narrow liaison which existed between the spirit of Proudhon and the Greek genius: this kinship is so strong that ordinarily our author did not himself perceive his recollections and that he reproduced nearly exactly the theories borrowed from antiquity."

⁷Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIV, 1892, p. 45.

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central conception of Hellenic society, Sorel reaffirmed, had been based on war, unity and discipline.⁸

Man, Sorel continued in his essay on Proudhon, was not the metaphysical being which the eighteenth century philosophers had imagined. Man lived within natural elements, limited by organic laws. Man, he wrote, ". . . se produit dans le monde armé de ressources, en possession de forces économique de tout genre."⁹ While this activity had been regulated by legislators, their delimitation of legality was not based on an abstract metaphysical concept of justice, it had been based on an estimation of forces in conflict. Quoting Proudhon Sorel wrote: "L'histoire, tout entière, temoigne de la réalité du droit de la force."¹⁰ And the cause of war, Sorel wrote, according to Proudhon was deprivation:

Sous toutes ses formes, la cause profonde de la guerre reste la même . . . difficulté de vivre, manque du nécessaire chez le pauvre . . . en un mot, la faim. Le dieu des armées et le dieu de la misere sont un seul et même dieu.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁹ Ibid., p. 47. ". . . produces himself in the world armed with resources in possession of economic forces of every type."

¹⁰ Ibid. Reference is to la Guerre et la paix, t. 1 p. 225. "History, in its entirety, witness the reality of the law of force."

¹¹ Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIV, 1892, p. 50, la Guerre et la paix, t. II, p. 282.

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The contradictions which led to economic deprivation, Sorel wrote, originated in: ". . . la faculté que nous avons désignée sous le nom de liberté,"¹² which was an absolute concept. It did not correspond to reality precisely because of this absolutism. The illusion of this dangerous absolutism could be dispelled only through an education which inculcated the value of work, and which rejected the selfish individualism engendered by the false teachings of the classical economists. One of Proudhon's important contributions to human betterment, Sorel believed, was his powerful attack on the anti-science of the classical economists, especially Adam Smith, David Ricardo and J. B. Say.¹³

Proudhon showed, according to Sorel, that the political economists misunderstood the concept of value, which properly belonged to the domain of psychological phenomena: "le travail se trouve ainsi placé dans le sphère des concepts psychologiques; et le raisonnement

of necessities among the poor . . . in a word, hunger. The god of armies and the god of misery are one and the same god.

¹²Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIV, 1892, p. 53.
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¹³Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIII, 1892, p. 623.

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de Proudhon nous semble, ici irréfutable."¹⁴ Society, Sorel believed, was not made up of absolutely free individuals each seeking his own private well being:

. . . la société est un être vivant, dont la personnalité est aussi certaine que celle de l'être individuel. L'être social est à la fois producteur et consommateur: chacun des membres apporte son contingent de travail et entre en échange avec tous les autres.¹⁵

Sorel's pessimism, partly derived from Proudhon, resulted from his belief that although work was a fundamental consequence of the human constitution, there existed also in man " . . . un défaut d'équilibre: la faculté de consommer est illimitée, tandis que celle de produire ne l'est pas."¹⁶ But, Sorel added, if it is correct to assign work to the category of psychological phenomena, we must also consider consumption from the same point of view. While economic progress had ameliorated somewhat the physical life Sorel complained,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 626. " . . . work finds itself thus placed in the sphere of psychological concepts, and the reasoning of Proudhon here seems to us irrefutable."

¹⁵Ibid., p. 628. Sorel referred here to Proudhon's Contradictions, t. I, pp. 92, 98.

. . . society is a living being, whose personality is as certain as that of an individual being. The social being is both producer and consumer: each of its members brings his work contingent and enters an exchange with all others.

¹⁶Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIII, 1892, p. 629. See also Proudhon's la Guerre et la paix, t. II, p. 126. " . . . a defect of equilibrium: the faculty of consuming is unlimited while that of production is not."

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the mind of man had been largely ignored. Men have, Sorel wrote, feared physical poverty, and thus failed to appreciate the impact of spiritual starvation:

. . . la pauvreté n'est point un objet d'effroi pour l'homme pénétré de l'idée de justice; celle a été célébrée par l'antiquité et par la religion chrétienne. Le héros est pauvre, tempérant et entouré d'une famille nombreuse. . . .¹⁷

Sorel concluded that, "L'homme ne peut se passer d'idéal; non seulement il le crée, mais il tend à le réaliser. Lorsque l'homme n'est pas entièrement dominé par la justice, il produit d'autres idées."¹⁸

Sorel summarized his observations from his study of Proudhon when he concluded that an economic science must have for its object the rational study of the value produced by human industry. Economic work, he believed, was a psychological phenomena, in the same sense that consumption was dominated by psychological states. Therefore, economic equilibrium did not depend only on biological laws; work alone would not ameliorate poverty. History proved that man had the ability to conceive ideas and to act upon them. The idea of absolute individual

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 633.

. . . poverty is not an object of fright for man penetrated by the idea of justice; this has been celebrated by antiquity and the Christian religion. The hero is poor, temperate and surrounded by a large family.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 638. "Man cannot pass the ideal; not only he created it but he tries to realize it. When man is not entirely dominated by justice, he produces other ideas."

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liberty had led, he said, to industrial war, and self-seeking, which caused man to scorn justice and pursue illusions. Education, Sorel believed, was the most powerful means of establishing equilibrium, but this education must have manual work as its basis. "Education must be a life-long process," he concluded, "which would continually elevate man toward an equilibrium between knowledge and the needs of human industry."¹⁹

Karl Marx

Georges Sorel's first reference to Marx appeared in a letter written to the director of the Revue philosophique. It was published in May, 1893, one year after the publication of his essay on Proudhon.²⁰ In his letter, Sorel attacked such sociologists as Gabriel Tarde and other of "les détenteurs des chairs officielles" for having attempted to debunk and ridicule the theories of Karl Marx through the use of arguments which he termed " . . . rêveries idéalistes incapables de résoudre les problèmes modernes."²¹ Karl Marx, Sorel insisted, was

¹⁹Alcan, Revue philosophique XXXIV, 1892, pp. 67, 68.

²⁰Georges Goriely wrote: "C'est en juin 1893 que nous trouvons le premier text de Sorel portant sur le marxisme." However, the letter, which he then quoted extensively, appeared in May, 1893. See le Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel, p. 57. See also Revue philosophique, XXXV, 1893, "Science et Socialisme," p. 509.

²¹Ibid. " . . . idealistic dreams incapable of resolving modern problems."

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not a mediocre thinker. Capital by Marx was not written for the sake of amusing the reader, and the complaint against its complexity was as absurd, Sorel said, as it would be to make the same complaint against Aristotle's Politics.²² One of the merits of Marx, Sorel added

" . . . a été de placer la science sociale sur le seul terrain qui lui convienne, en admettant qu'il existe une science sociale."²³ Many intelligent people, Sorel complained, thought of Socialism only as a dangerous radicalism which would do violence to the bourgeoisie, but Sorel observed: " . . . tout changement doit se faire par la force."²⁴ What does Socialism demand, he asked?

Socialism, Sorel continued, had claimed to establish an economic science and if its claims were founded, its theories should be applied: " . . . ce qui est rationnel et démontré doit devenir réel."²⁵ The belief

²²Ibid., p. 509.

²³Ibid. " . . . had been to place social science on the sole ground which suited it, in admitting that a social science existed."

²⁴Ibid., p. 510. " . . . all change must make itself by force."

²⁵Ibid. Sorel admitted that all absolute conclusions were forbidden to the enlightened men of his day because reason and science were known to be mental constructions. The moralists were affected by the same skepticism. But he added: "N'est-ce pas un spectacle admirable que de voir les peuples rester fideles aux vieux principes, croire encore au droit et à la vérité absolue,

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of modern socialism that it has discovered a true economic science, Sorel concluded, has not been successfully refuted. Karl Marx seemed to believe that economics were susceptible of scientific investigation. Sorel was uncertain: "Voila longtemps que je cherche, en vain, la solution de cette question capitale et je n'ai encore trouvé de réponse nulle part."²⁶

La Nouvelle Métaphysique

In 1894, Sorel wrote a lengthy essay which appeared in L'Ere nouvelle and was entitled "la Nouvelle Métaphysique." A few years later in 1898, Edouard Berth, while a student at the Sorbonne, read the essay and became a life-long admirer of its author, Georges Sorel. Berth, writing in 1935, noted that Sorel had written this essay immediately after having studied Marx and " . . . dans la toute premiere ferveur marxiste. . . ." ²⁷ A more resolute Sorel had emerged from his reading of Marx:

quand ceux qui devraient les diriger n'y croient plus?"
Ibid. " . . . that which is rational and demonstrated must become real."

²⁶Ibid. "For a long time I've searched in vain, the solution to this capital question, I have yet found a response anywhere."

²⁷Georges Sorel, D'Aristote a Marx (Paris: Marcel Riviere, 1936), avant-propos de Edouard Berth, p. 1. (Hereinafter referred to as D'Aristote à Marx.) This work is the book-length republication of Sorel's earlier article which first appeared as "L'Ancienne et la Nouvelle Métaphysique" in L'Ere nouvelle, 1894. " . . . in the first marxist fervor."

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"I believe," he wrote in the opening lines of "la Nouvelle Métaphysique," "that the theories of Karl Marx represent the most important innovation in the last several hundred years of philosophy. All of our ideas today must center around the new principles posed by scientific socialism."²⁸

Sorel, whose preoccupation with the role of work in human life had already emerged, stated in "la Nouvelle Métaphysique" that in order to establish a rational knowledge of man: ". . . il est toujours nécessaire de le considérer tout entier, comme travailleur, et de ne jamais le séparer des appareils avec lesquels il gagne sa vie."²⁹ Richard Humphrey discovered in this inclination toward the concrete and tangible approach to understanding, the impact of Sorel's career as an engineer:

Like the engineer he accepted abstract theory of any kind only with considerable reserve. His epistemology might well be described as prehensile: the way of perception he most trusted was through the hand; the kind of people he most trusted were those who used their hands to deal with the world--working people and artists.³⁰

²⁸Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 94.

²⁹Ibid., p. 96. ". . . it always necessary to consider him in entirety, as worker, to never separate him from the apparatus with which he gains his life."

³⁰Richard Humphrey, Georges Sorel Prophet without Honor, a Study in Anti-Intellectualism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 64.

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Sorel stated that he had entitled his article

. . . 'l'ancienne et nouvelle métaphysique',
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le principe social, si longtemps négligé, grâce
auquel il est possible d'établir une connaissance
rationnelle de l'homme.³¹

The economists who studied philosophy according
to the classical method introduced by Adam Smith, Sorel
observed, had great difficulties with the theories of
Karl Marx. To them, Marx attempted " . . . à introduire
dans la science moderne une de ces entités scolastiques
régénérées dans la nuageuse Germaine."³² The same
resistance was offered by "les savants français" in the
seventeenth century when they encountered the theories
of Newton.³³ The classical economists, supported by such

³¹Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 96.

. . . 'the old and new metaphysic', because I am
going to review the methods employed by in diverse
branches of knowledge, discuss principles, signal
the illusions upon which the official metaphysics
lives, discover the sources of spiritualist
delirium, research the relations of science and
the economic milieu and to finally redeem the
social principle, so long neglected, thanks to
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³²Ibid., p. 244. " . . . to introduce to modern
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³³Ibid.

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philosophers as John Stuart Mill, Sorel claimed, had denied the existence of social characteristics: "Les hommes dans l'état de société sont toujours des hommes, leurs actions et leurs passions obéissent aux lois de la nature humaine individuelle."³⁴ Yet, Sorel complained, no science of individual human acts existed in 1894 and thus the reference to laws of individual human nature was without meaning. The classical economists believed that society was a "collection historiquement formée" in which nothing social in itself existed.³⁵ Thus, work was conceived as an individual act; exchange was an act which concerned only two persons; and law "intervient . . . pour prévenir certains abus pouvait engender le désordre."³⁶ But in real life, men rarely execute their projects alone, Sorel noted, and the resulting literary, religious, scientific and moral associations were therefore of great interest to philosophy. With respect to the existence of the state Sorel wrote: "Jamais les psychologues n'en donneront la raison d'être, car c'est

³⁴Ibid. John Stuart Mill is credited with this observation but the reference is incomplete and the source is thus uncertain. "Men in the state of society are always men, their actions and passions obey the laws of individual human nature."

³⁵Ibid., p. 246.

³⁶Ibid. " . . . intervened to prevent certain abuses able to engender disorder."

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chose étrangère à leurs études."³⁷ John Stuart Mill had said that man did not change in society, but Sorel objected " . . . où donc l'homme est-il autrement qu'en société? Si on le considère à l'état individuel, c'est par une abstraction scientifique. . . . "³⁸

The awakener to the dual nature of human existence for Sorel was language, which, he believed gave to all human actions a double character: individual and social. Aristotle, Sorel wrote, defined man as a rational and social animal, but this definition could be extended "car le mot travailleur comprend pour les modernes les deux expressions d'être vivant et d'être raisonnable; nous disons donc que l'homme est un travailleur social."³⁹

Sorel thus believed that human actions could be examined from a double point of view. Because personal processes had no common measure, Sorel thought they could only be examined within the individual, but the objective effects caused by material transformations constituted

³⁷ Ibid., p. 251. In a footnote Sorel adds: " . . . l'État n'a pas été historiquement produit avec des attractions psychologiques." Ibid. "Never will psychologists give the reason of being, for it is a strange thing to their studies."

³⁸ Ibid. " . . . where is man other than in society? If one considers him in an individual state, it is by a scientific abstraction."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 253. "for the word worker understands for moderns two expressions to be living and to be reasonable; we say then that man is a social worker."

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for him a domaine of comparison. There were, for him, two realms of objective and subjective human life, closely interlaced and difficult to separate, especially Sorel wrote: "dans le domaine éthique, les distinctions du social et de l'individuel sont fort délicats. . . ." ⁴⁰

The cause of behavior was complex and often unpredictable movements, Sorel wrote, "sont déterminés par l'appétit qui se dirige vers un bien présent où vers un bien considéré comme un futur désirable; l'appétit est subordonné lui-même à nos états affectifs au moment de l'action." ⁴¹

In the Middle Ages each individual had been considered as an "unité isolée"; an individual who was placed before a sovereign judge. Today it was necessary to reject this individualism, so planted in the European mind, and to " . . . reconnaître comme base de tous nos raisonnements un caractère social dans les actes humaines." ⁴² In this regard Karl Marx had recognized the importance of industrial tools, and the machine:

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 255. "Today the goal of education," Sorel wrote, " . . . est de constituer un système d'appétits dirigeant l'homme d'après les règles qui caractérisent le milieu." Ibid. " . . . in the ethical domain, the distinctions of social and individual are strongly delicate."

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 256. " . . . are determined by the appetite which directs itself toward a present good or good considered a desirable future; appetite is subordinated itself to our emotional states in the moment of action."

⁴² Ibid., p. 258. " . . . to recognize as base of all our reasoning a social character in human acts."

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"L'analyse du machinisme et de ses effets nous fournit le moyen, dans tous les ordres d'idées, de passer des aperçus subjectifs, personnels, grossiers, d'une philosophie livrée au hasard--aux données objectifs, sociales, abstraites, de la science."⁴³ Thus Sorel concluded that all the formations of the human mind, including moral ideas, myths and legends had their own histories:

. . . ces illusions se traduisent dans la conscience par certains manières de sentir; elles ont leur côté subjectif et psychologique. . . . C'est par leur forme psychologique que les illusions se soutiennent le plus longtemps et qu'elles exercent leur influence morbide.⁴⁴

The duty of science was, Sorel said, ". . . de déterminer l'entité métaphysique cachée, qui donne la traduction abstraite des impulsions internes et enfin de signaler l'illusion, si elle existe."⁴⁵ When this was done, Sorel believed, it would be discovered that the system of sentimental illusions was always the reflection of the economic

⁴³Ibid., p. 261. "The analysis of mechanism and its effects furnish us the means, in all orders of ideas, to pass from subjective, personal, general glimpses of a society delivered by chance--to objective, abstract, and social givens of science."

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 262.
 . . . these illusions translate themselves in conscience by certain types of feeling; they have their subjective and psychological side. . . . It is by their psychological form that illusions sustain themselves the longest and exercise their morbid influence.

⁴⁵Ibid. " . . . to determine the hidden metaphysical entity, which gives the abstract translations internal impulses and finally to signal the illusion, if it exists."

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system. To judge a body of moral doctrines, Sorel advised, the psychological approach must be abandoned, and following Marxist materialism one must recognize the existence " . . . d'un milieu artificiel, que nos efforts tendent à modifier constamment."⁴⁶

The existence of this 'milieu artificiel' was, according to Sorel, the fundamental condition of human freedom: "Nous sommes libres en ce sens que nous pouvons construire des appareils qui n'ont aucun modele dans le milieu cosmique; nous ne changeons rien aux lois de la nature, mais nous sommes maîtres de créer des séquences ayant une ordonnance qui nous est propre."⁴⁷ What might be accomplished in this circumstance, Sorel concluded, would be " . . . une connaissance progressif, en rapport avec l'étendue de notre activité industrielle."⁴⁸ But our ambitions for complete understanding must be limited, Sorel wrote: "Non, le monde n'est pas limité, en ce sens que nous pouvons dire où il s'arrête; et la limitation est un non-sens; mais nous ne pouvons connaître que les

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 264. " . . . of an artificial milieu, that our efforts constantly try to modify."

⁴⁷Ibid. "We are free in the sense that we are able to construct apparatuses which have no model in the cosmic world; we change nothing of the laws of nature, but we are masters to create sequences having an order which is proper to us."

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 266. " . . . a progressive knowledge, in harmony with the extent of our industrial activity."

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choses appartenant au milieu artificiel."⁴⁹ Extend the activity of man, Sorel advised, " . . . inventez de nouvelles machines et vous gagnerez quelque chose sur le domaine de l'inconnu, en agrandissant sur le champ de la coopération de l'homme et des énergies naturelles dans le milieu artificiel."⁵⁰

The domain of the unknown, the realm beyond science, was an area in which philosophers had said, according to Sorel, " . . . notre nature est constituée de telle sorte que nous ne pouvons nous désintéresser. . . . "⁵¹ And no serious objection could be offered to the "philosophes spiritualistes" when they entered the territory which had been abandoned by science, said Sorel, because " . . . il n'y a point, en effet, de limite de la connaissance. . . . "⁵² Sorel believed that mankind commenced its intellectual life by asking metaphysical questions with

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 267. "No, the world is not limited, in the sense that we are able to say where it stops; and limitation is nonsense; but we can only know the things belonging to the artificial milieu."

⁵⁰Ibid. " . . . invent new machines and you will gain something in the domain of the unknown, in enlarging on the field of cooperation of man and his natural energies in the artificial milieu."

⁵¹Ibid., p. 152. " . . . our nature is constituted such that we cannot disinterest ourselves."

⁵²Ibid., p. 153. " . . . there is not, in effect, a limit of knowledge. . . . "

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the result that theology preceded science. Both were, he said, attempts to penetrate the unknown by a system of constructions which he called "paraphysiques." Each such system had its own unique history, " . . . les auteurs les ont pris dans le milieu, sans se rendre un compte exacte de ce qu'ils faisaient."⁵³ The true metaphysician, Sorel believed, must never separate a doctrine from the circumstances of its birth or from the images which exist in what Sorel called "l'air ambiant." The philosophers mistakenly believed, Sorel thought, that their new hypotheses were the product of their own intellectual genius, but in reality they had, according to Sorel, converted impressions of their milieu and thus " . . . nous pouvons donc dire que la vraie critique métaphysique est fondée sur la détermination des conditions matérielles données dans le milieu."⁵⁴

Therefore, to understand modern metaphysics, Sorel advised, one must investigate its principle directing

⁵³Ibid., p. 165. " . . . the authors have taken them in the milieu, without realizing exactly what they were doing."

⁵⁴Ibid. " . . . we can thus say that the true metaphysical critique is founded on the determination of material conditions given in the milieu."

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forces.⁵⁵ And in the 1890's Sorel believed that a particular type of individualism had become so powerful that it formed the basis of psychological studies. This individualism took the intensely personal form of what Sorel called "le moi" defined as: ". . . l'ensemble de nos émotions; ce qui est vraiment personnel dans l'homme c'est le sentiment."⁵⁶ Instead of considering the individual as a part of the larger human species, "le moi" represented for Sorel the ". . . invasion des émotions dans le domaine des représentations."⁵⁷

This narrow conception of "le moi" was broadened considerably, according to Sorel, by the teachings of Henri Bergson, whom he characterized as "a vigorous tree which raised itself above the desolated steppes of

⁵⁵In a footnote, Sorel offered the following materialist interpretation: "Il y aurait à montrer que ces directions sont commandées par les relations économiques; cela ne présente pas une sérieuse difficulté, au moins pour notre époque, caractérisée par la concentration industrielle, la rapidité vertigineuse avec laquelle se forment les grandes fortunes des spéculateurs, le développement des moyens de jouissance." Ibid., pp. 165-66.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 166. ". . . the totality of our emotions; that which is truly personal in man is sentiment."

⁵⁷Ibid. ". . . the invasion of emotions in the domain of representations."

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contemporary philosophy."⁵⁸ Bergson, Sorel stated, had discovered "deux mois différent"; the first was discovered through deep reflection which revealed the internal state of being, but these moments of internal self-awareness were very rare and thus for the most part Sorel wrote: "we live externally to ourselves"; ". . . nous n'apercevons de notre moi que son fantôme décoloré."⁵⁹ Thus, Sorel believed, we live for the external world more than for ourselves; we speak more than we think. For Henri Bergson, Sorel continued, the fundamental "moi" was the internal self totally agitated by emotion, relieved of all which originated from the exterior. For Sorel that which was truly individual was discovered in the emotional side of human life.⁶⁰ And it was this realm which produced indeterminism in human affairs; an indeterminism which Sorel believed would always escape exact scientific representation; ". . . toute étude sérieuse de l'homme doit être basée sur l'impossibilité

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 168. This represents the first reference to Henri Bergson in the work of Georges Sorel.

⁵⁹Ibid. Quoted from Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, Henry Bergson, p. 31. ". . . we notice our me only as its discolored phantom."

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 178.

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de représenter les états affectifs."⁶¹ Nevertheless, Sorel believed that human activities could be studied in a more exact manner than had been practiced in the past. " . . . on peut espérer faire . . . un ensemble de systématiques descriptives, qui doivent être révisées de temps à autre, en tenant compte des modifications des milieux."⁶² This study was a necessary component of human education which had as its goal, the object of directing life such that certain acts would be found agreeable and attractive while others would be found disagreeable or repulsive. Education acted, Sorel wrote, to " . . . superposer à notre affectivité naturelle des habitudes morales, qui sont, en quelque sorte, l'impression sur nous des systèmes moraux reçus comme bons dans le milieu."⁶³ The work of education would be impossible, Sorel observed, in the conclusion of his essay "la nouvelle Métaphysique," if the education had no method

⁶¹Ibid., p. 179. " . . . all serious study of man must be based on the impossibility of representing the emotional states."

⁶²Ibid., p. 188. " . . . we can hope to make a group of systematic descriptions, which must be revised from time to time, taking into account modifications of the milieu."

⁶³Ibid., p. 189. Sorel also noted the origins of this idea in Aristotle's Ethics. " . . . to superimpose on our natural emotion of moral habits, which are in some way, the impression on us of moral systems received as good in the milieu."

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for studying individually the characteristics of each student--this method Sorel believed could only be furnished by experimental psychology which must become:

" . . . la science critique des méthodes vraies propres à l'éducation de la volonté."⁶⁴

La Ruine Du Monde Antique

la Ruine du monde antique was first published by Sorel in 1894 in "L'Ere nouvelle."⁶⁵ It represented an attempt to study the Christian ideology within the context of the late Roman Empire. Far from having restored vigor to the Roman organism, Sorel wrote of the Christian influence: " . . . on pourrait dire qu'elle l'a saigné à blanc."⁶⁶ The Christian ideology, according to Sorel, weakened the structure of the Roman world; it cut the lines between the social system of the Romans and the minds

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 190. " . . . the critical science of true methods proper to the education of the will."

⁶⁵Sorel called L'Ere nouvelle the "revue de socialisme scientifique." It was founded by M. Diamandy in July, 1893, and became defunct by November, 1894, at which time the publishers initiated "le Devenir social" (Giard and Brière, editors) in August, 1895, the final issue appeared in December, 1898. Georges Sorel, La ruine du monde antique (Paris: Librairie G; Jacques et Cie., 1901), p. 1. (Hereinafter referred to as la Ruine du monde antique.)

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 37. " . . . we could say that it bled it to white."

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of its citizens, and Sorel continued, it planted everywhere the " . . . germes de quiétisme, de désespérance et de mort."⁶⁷

One of the most serious consequences for Roman civilization, Sorel continued, which " . . . contribué à précipiter la ruine de l'Empire romain . . . " was the clear understanding which Christianity gave of the " . . . incoherence qui existait entre la réalité et l'édifice juridique traditionnel."⁶⁸ When such an understanding comes into being, Sorel said, even those institutions which appear most solid are in danger of collapsing.

Sorel defined law as an organized system of forms which, like language, experienced an evolution which " . . . se dissocier de ses principes générateurs."⁶⁹ For this reason, Sorel believed, judicial constructions outlived their originating motives, and lost their original meaning with the result that they became very difficult to interpret. This "dissociation," Sorel added,

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 37-38. Sorel compared this impact to his conception of scientific socialism: "Le marxisme se présent, au contraire, comme une doctrine de vie, bonne pour les peuple forts: il réduit l'idéologie au rôle d'artifice pour l'exposition abrégée de la réalité."
Ibid., p. 38. " . . . seeds of quiet, despair, and death."

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 39. " . . . incoherence which existed between reality and the traditional judicial edifice."

⁶⁹Ibid. " . . . disassociated itself from its generating principles."

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could not be explained away by legalistic metaphysics; it was necessary to take account of " . . . l'infrastructure économique" and also of history because all formal social systems endured on the basis of " . . . le système des opinions reçues."⁷⁰ But these systems themselves, he said, were always full of contradictions, thanks to which evolution was facilitated. When a new fact was produced, Sorel believed, it was judged in two different ways: the public power applied judicial formulae, while the general public relied upon a system of received opinion. There is always, Sorel noted, a certain contradiction between these two points of view. The system of received opinion was the more flexible; it always followed transformations in economic conditions of life. The difference between the formal law and the milieu of received opinion, according to Sorel, accounted for the disassociation between law and morality. The jury system, Sorel observed, was the " . . . organe des opinions reçues . . . " in France.⁷¹

The original Christians who did assume a revolutionary aspect, Sorel noted, did so because of the class to which they belonged. This heroic time was the period

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 40. Note that in this discussion Sorel does not tie the climate of opinion thesis to a particular class. " . . . the system of received opinions."

⁷¹Ibid., p. 43. " . . . organ of received opinions."

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But during the ensuing centuries, the new Christianity made important concessions to the usages of Roman society, and, Sorel noted, the Christians became Roman.

Nevertheless, Sorel observed in Christian ideology, " . . . une création chrétienne originale, dont l'importance fut grande: la vie religieuse est opposée à la vie mondaine, non seulement comme plus parfaite théoriquement, mais aussi comme plus heureuse."⁷³ By their renunciation, the early Christians and later the monastics offered living examples of their convictions; the effect of this drama, Sorel observed, could be very powerful in certain milieu, but the Christians failed to appreciate the degree to which class affiliation would effect the sentimental impact of renunciation. Also Sorel thought that few people were capable of a life of renunciation: "Le monde ne vit pas uniquement pour la gloire, le bonheur ou l'extase de quelques saints, la société est chose très

⁷²Here Sorel accepted the opinion rendered by M. G. Boissier, La fin du paganisme, Etude sur les dernières luttes religieuses en Occident au I^{ve} siècle, Hachette, éditeur, Paris, 1894. " . . . the clientel of the new religion was formed by a majority of people without respectability,"

⁷³Sorel, la ruine du monde antique, p. 57. " . . . an original Christian creation, whose importance was great: the religious life is opposed to the worldly life, not only as theoretically more perfect, but also as more happy."

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prosaique."⁷⁴ Christianity succeeded in establishing that the pagan system was not viable, Sorel concluded, by demonstrating the incoherence which existed in the Roman system but it failed to provide a viable alternative and this " . . . concluait à la destruction de toute société humaine possible."⁷⁵

The educational system, always a principle concern for Sorel, was also discussed in la Ruine du monde antique.⁷⁶ What was the fundamental character of education in Rome, he asked? Sorel believed that the character of education was directly related to the ends which the system sought. Cicero had demanded, according to Sorel, that the orator give himself totally to his art; he must study everything and know everything in law, history, philosophy and the sciences. This encyclopedic

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 62. Note the same complaint against the Socratic ethic throughout le proces du Socrate. "The world does not live only for glory, the happiness and ecstasy of some saints, society is a very prosaic thing."

⁷⁵Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 63. ". . . concluded the destruction of all possible human society."

⁷⁶From Edouard Berth who became interested in Sorel after reading D'Aristote à Marx and la Ruine du monde antique, comes the suggestion that educational reform was a very current topic around la Sorbonne and this element in Sorel greatly interested him. ". . . la question du latin et de l'école unique . . . des événements récents . . . donnent un regain d'acuité et d'actualité . . ." D'Aristote à Marx, avant-propos, p. 8.

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education was, Sorel believed, the identical principle of modern education and he scorned it as an enterprise without end, a veritable insanity.⁷⁷ In its place he demanded an educational system which prepared the young for the real struggles of economic life. The Romans too often subordinated everything to rhetoric, Sorel wrote. The goal of education for them was to form "argumentateurs." In Rome, he continued, the schools of rhetoric had prospered; the professors of rhetoric became important and widely respected. The Christian church, after its triumph, failed to change this system of education, because its goal was to form men of talent capable of producing subtle arguments to counter metaphysical errors: " . . . elle ne pouvait pas mieux faire que de suivre l'exemple des Romains, qui avaient excellé dans ce genre."⁷⁸ Such an education, Sorel charged, resulted in what he called a "état de dissociation idéologique"-- in which the sense of the reality of things was lost. And the Christians, he noted, by adopting this system encouraged the development of a monstrous egotism which caused the student to consider the intellectual resources placed at his disposal as a feeble tribute rendered to his talent. This classical education, Sorel wrote:

⁷⁷Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 69.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 70. " . . . it cannot do better than to follow the example of the Romans, who have excelled in this genre."

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"Constitue un milieu factice de beaux esprits dans lequel le principe des droits du talent est accepté sans contestation; elle donne à ceux qui l'ont reçu, un sentiment de leur supériorité qui les empêche de voir la vraie nature des choses."⁷⁹ And of all the aristocracies, Sorel believed, the most treacherous, the harshest, and the least accessible to scientific conceptions was the aristocracy of talent because it could achieve such a level of intellectual corruption that it never doubted the legitimacy of its acts.

The exploitation of social resources by men of talent was only possible, Sorel thought, when society gave a privileged place to the lovers of things purely intellectual. This happened in Rome, Sorel charged, and was transmitted to the modern world by the ecclesiastical tradition: "L'Eglise a donc été la grande protectrice des préjugés qui ont permis aux talents de prendre une si grande importance dans le monde."⁸⁰

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 74. "Constitutes an artificial milieu of beautiful spirits in which the principle of the rights of talent is accepted without dispute; it gives to those who have received it, a sentiment of their superiority which prevents them from seeing the true nature of things."

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 76. Is this the anti-intellectualism of Georges Sorel? He writes further: "La corruption inéluctable des hommes de plume n'a jamais été sérieusement discutée; les écrivains de la Renaissance pratiquent avec une souplesse charmante l'art de se faire entretenir par les grands." Ibid. "The Church has thus been the great protector of prejudices which has permitted talents to take such a great importance in the world."

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The Christian church, Sorel charged, again followed the example of the Romans who had constructed luxurious edifices and had spent enormous sums to amuse and nourish a population of "fainéants." The Christians too raised monuments whose objective was to strongly strike the imagination; to inspire astonishment; and to manifest the disproportion which existed between its work and that of the laique world. As in the instance of Versailles,⁸¹ the Christian church " . . . ne veut pas seulement que les choses qu'elle fait, soient une marque de puissance; mais elle veut encore qu'elles soient un témoignage de la servitude volontaire des fideles."⁸² This, Sorel observed, was an example of the stupid luxury of "parvenus";⁸³ such expenditures occurred in the

⁸¹Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 80. Sorel scorned the structure at Versailles: ". . . quelle est l'utilite du palais de Versailles?" Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 81. Sorel here quoted Renan, Histoire d'Israël, tome V p. 265 as a source for his perspective in this discussion. Sorel's evaluation of gothic architecture is especially hostile when he compares it to "l'art civique des républiques grecques." He wrote, "Lorsque l'art gothique se fut pleinement développé, qu'il se fut dégagé des traditions primitives et des timidités du début, alors il devint un ramassis d'extravagances et la décadence marcha à pas de géant." See also Taine, Philosophie de l'art, tome I, p. 97, upon which Sorel relied for this point of view. ". . . doesn't only wish the things it does to be a mark of power but it wishes still that they be a testimony of the voluntary servitude of the faithful."

⁸³Sorel referred to "archéologie chrétienne" for his assertion and mentioned a work by A. Péaté, Archéologie chrétienne, p. 180. See Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 83. "the newly rich."

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IV century, a century in which the Roman Empire had great need of its resources. "Under the Christian influence," Sorel wrote, ". . . men became less and less occupied with social ends; an idealistic economy developed simultaneously with a monkish asceticism, and social relationships became purely mystical."⁸⁴

Georges Sorel believed that the Christian ideology during the IV century was gradually altering the system of received opinions which had served to maintain the moral and social system of the Romans. During periods of transition he observed: ". . . hypocrisy is for a time an agent of social preservation."⁸⁵ Renan, whose Histoire d'Israël had influenced Sorel's conception of the role of fictions in the maintenance of received moral systems, was quoted by Sorel on the relationship between these fictions and the faculty of reason: "La moralité d'un peuple demande d'énormes sacrifices à la raison; les progrès de la raison nuisent à la moralité des masses qui se gouvernent par l'instinct."⁸⁶ These sentimental

⁸⁴Without explaining these terms, Sorel noted parenthetically that if not mystical ". . . je dirais presque magiques." Ibid., p. 90.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 92-93. See also Renan, Histoire d'Israël, tome IV, p. 359. "The morality of a people demands enormous sacrifices to reason; the progress of reason harms the morality of masses who govern themselves by instinct."

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fictions, Sorel wrote, form barriers to critical thinking; they enclose us in a narrow circle whose limits are determined by the milieu. The Roman organization of life rested on such fictions, which could impose themselves only on the condition of never being discussed; the ancient things were reputed good by the single fact of their antiquity: " . . . la conquête avait été une oeuvre surhumaine, échappant à toute critique."⁸⁷ Saint Augustine in The City of God, Sorel stated, engaged in a polemic against the contradictions which he found in the Roman fictions and against the ridiculous and immoral elements in the Roman legends. The idea of the superhuman right of the Roman conquests, Sorel wrote, was gradually supplanted by a providential conception which the Christians had borrowed from the Hebrew writers: it taught that the revolution of empires was directed by God in view of the prosperity of the church.⁸⁸

The ecclesiastical authors then took the position, Sorel continued, of defending the rights of religion represented by the Christian church, against what they called the despotisms of the Roman state.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 98. " . . . the conquest has been a superhuman work, escaping every critique."

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 105.

⁸⁹From this Renan concluded that: "Rome est l'Etat laïque, elle ne s'occupe pas de religion, elle laisse cette question à la liberté de chacun; voilà son

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Christians also transformed the philosophical idea that reason was the true sovereign in human life, into a personalized theory of reason represented by a sovereign judge: ". . . d'un Dieu réel et sensible, ayant chair et sang."⁹⁰ This disrupted the social bonds between citizen and state, because Sorel stated, the faithful ceased to regard himself as uniquely tied by civic obligation; he became aware of the idea that it was better to obey God than man. But the Christian was not truly isolated, the Christian church was close to him: ". . . c'est pourquoi cette prétendue indépendance va se changer en une servitude absolue."⁹¹ The theologians claimed, Sorel continued, that they possessed a science more certain than any other--a science which was necessary for the salvation of the souls of individuals and for the prosperity of states; this science was absolute--outside of which was only error and deception. It was natural

immense supériorité." Quoted by Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 108. From Renan, Histoire d'Israël, tome IV, p. 269 and tome V, p. 144.

⁹⁰Sorel, la Ruine du monde antique, p. 134.
". . . of a God, real and sensitive, having flesh and blood."

⁹¹Ibid., p. 135. Here Sorel is responding to M. Boissier, Fin du paganisme, Etude sur les dernières luttes religieuses en Occident au IVe siècle. M. Boissier had credited Christianity with the development of individual liberty; Sorel disagreed. ". . . it is why this pretended independence is going to change itself into absolute servitude."

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that these theologians would become dogmatic and intolerant, Sorel concluded: "L'intolérance est une nécessité pour toute théologie sérieuse."⁹²

The Roman world was perfectly ready to accept mystical superstitions, Sorel wrote, because like all skeptical historical epochs which exhalt the seeking after pleasure, Rome, too, prepared its own ruin.⁹³ Those who always speak of happiness, Sorel stated, and who do not find it in the accomplishment of their ordinary tasks, are symptoms of a true social malaise. It is certain, Sorel wrote, ". . . que durant les premiers siècles de notre ère, le monde romain a été sous l'influence de ce malaise."⁹⁴ And it was in this context that the Romans turned toward the cults of Isis, of Sérapis, of Mithro; they had ". . . quelque chose de plus tendre, de plus dévot que les cultes grecs et latin, si grossiers, si arides."⁹⁵ The pursuit of happiness through the means

⁹²Ibid., p. 137. "Intolerance is a necessity for every serious theologian."

⁹³Ibid., p. 156.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 154. ". . . during the first centuries of our era, the Roman world was under the influence of this malaise."

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 156. This quote from Renan, Histoire d'Israël, tome V, p. 243. In a footnote Sorel took exception to the inclusion of Mithra: ". . . mithraïsme était une religion austère et dure. . . ." Ibid. ". . . something most tender, most devout of the Greek and Latin cults, so coarse, so dry."

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of an ultra-scientific savior is the great force of occultism in all its instances, Sorel concluded. Sometimes, Sorel believed, this pursuit is unconscious; people accept superstitions without taking account of the emotional attractions involved--but Sorel wrote, there is a law of psychology which applies: ". . . qu'aucune de ces croyances ne peut s'introduire en nous s'il n'y a pas une émotion qui lui ouvre le chemin et gêne notre faculté critique."⁹⁶

All discussions of morality by metaphysical philosophers have failed to result in action, Sorel concluded, because these thinkers have not undertaken an examination of the role played by the emotions in human life. The philosophers have created formal theories, Sorel wrote, but they have had no efficacy. In this respect, Christianity had created something new: "Le christianisme invent un puissant moyen de détermination."⁹⁷ The powerful emotion of love was disciplined, ". . . le fidèle arrive à développer dans son coeur, à un degré extraordinaire, l'amour pour Jésus, qu'il conçoit comme un être sensible semblable à lui, ayant

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 154. ". . . none of these beliefs can introduce themselves in us if there is not an emotion which opens the path to it and bothers our critical faculty."

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 255. "Christianity invented a powerful means of determination."

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une humanité identique à la sienne."⁹⁸ In order to please the God whom he loved, the faithful Christian, consented to deprive himself and to suffer in behalf of the poor whom he believed Jesus had loved; this privation seemed to the faithful to be good in itself. This aspect of the religious life, Sorel believed, was identical with that which could be found in human sexual relations:

" . . . la grande découverte du christianisme a été de trouver le moyen d'utiliser des facteurs de l'érotisme détournés vers la mystique."⁹⁹ Is there no way, Sorel asked, to utilize this discovery of Christianity without recourse to its mystical or supernatural embellishments?

Sorel purposed a moral reform which would liberate the power of sexual love, and to this end he wrote, " . . . c'est vers une amélioration des rapports sexuels que doit se porter toute l'attention du moraliste. . . . "¹⁰⁰ Sorel believed that as a consequence of this sexual revolution it would be possible for "l'amour normal à

⁹⁸Ibid. " . . . the faithful arrives to develop in his heart, to an extraordinary degree, love for Jesus, that he conceives to be a sensitive being similar to him, having a humanity identical to his own."

⁹⁹Ibid. See also Humphrey, Georges Sorel, Prophet Without Honor, pp. 75, 80. " . . . the great discovery of Christianity has been to find the means to utilize factors of eroticism channeled toward the mystical."

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 256. " . . . it is towards an amelioration of sexual relations that all the attention of moralists must be carried."

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developper en nous les sentiments de délicatesse et de bienveillance."¹⁰¹ The moral reform of man, Sorel stated, was inseparable from reform in the status of woman. He suggested it was necessary " . . . de compléter le système primitif de Marx par une théorie de la famille."¹⁰² Sorel believed that the liberation of women from their traditional status would reveal " . . . chez la femme une éducatrice qui nous apprendrait à voir des frères dans les déshérités."¹⁰³

Having completed his study of the ideological clash between the Roman civilization and the emerging Christian world view, Sorel speculated on the utility of historical studies. He did not believe that the past could be used to predict the future. His goal had been " . . . une interprétation philosophique des causes profondes des actions humaines."¹⁰⁴ The question of his historical method was never openly discussed because Sorel believed that the reader must judge for himself

¹⁰¹ Ibid. " . . . normal love to develop in us sentiments of delicacy and benevolence."

¹⁰² Ibid. " . . . to complete the primitive system of Marx by a theory of family."

¹⁰³ Ibid. " . . . the woman as educator who would teach us to see our brothers among the underprivileged."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., intro. p. 24. " . . . a philosophical interpretation of the profound causes of human actions."

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if the method employed had produced useful results. He wrote, "L'essential n'est pas de prouver que le mouvement existe, mais de le produire."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵Ibid. Georges Goriely drew the conclusion that la Ruine du Monde antique, showed Sorel to be anti-catholic and ". . . franchement anti-chrétiennes." Le Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel, Goriely, pp. 70-71. According to Michael Freund, Sorel's "hostility" toward Pope Leo XIII accounted for his anti-catholicism: "Leo XIII is for Sorel the incarnation of the entire epoch . . . Pope Pius IX had been a warrior pope (Kreiger-Papst) . . . who had been succeeded by orator (Redner-Papst). Vittorio Klostermann, Der Revolutionare Konservatismus (Francfort a/M: 1932), p. 46. The value of either opinion seems highly suspect to me. "The essential is not to prove that the movement exists but to produce it."

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER II

Between 1894 and 1897, Georges Sorel produced a prodigious flow of essays most of which appeared in the periodical le Devenir social. Chapter II presents a comprehensive review of these studies together with a complete bibliography for the three-year period 1895 - 1897 in appendix form at the end of the chapter. The varied subjects which interested Sorel during this period suggest the breadth and diversity of his mind. He discussed the sociology of Emile Durkheim as well as Gustave LeBon's book: The Psychology of Crowds. He conducted an inquiry into the psychological basis of human thought, and he produced a lengthy study of the seventeenth century Italian philosopher of law and cultural history: Giambattista Vico. This chapter also features extracts of the correspondence between Sorel and Benedetto Croce which coincided with this period of Sorel's career (1894-1897).

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CHAPTER II

LE DEVENIR SOCIAL: 1895 - 1897

From 1894 to 1897, Georges Sorel dedicated almost all of his time to writing for two Marxist revues: l'Ere nouvelle and le Devenir Social. When l'Ere nouvelle ceased publication in November, 1894, most of its collaborators became associated with the new le Devenir social which was founded by Paul Lafargue, Gabriel Deville, Alfred Bonnet and Georges Sorel in 1895. This was the year in which a friendship and life-long correspondence was initiated between Sorel and Benedetto Croce.¹ Of the friendship, Georges Goriely wrote, "Il n'est personne avec qui Sorel ait ressenti une affinité plus profonde qu'avec le philosophe napolitain."² Through Croce, Sorel became known to a circle of Italian Marxists, among whom was Antonio Labriola, a former

¹The letters addressed by Sorel to Benedetto Croce were published by Croce in Critica, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930.

²Goriely, La Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel, p. 81.

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teacher of Croce who had been since 1890 a principle Marxist spokesman in Italy. Sorel encouraged several Italians to collaborate in le Devenir social, and himself too became a contributor to several Italian periodicals.

As a collaborator in the production of le Devenir social between April, 1895, to October, 1897, Sorel produced a prodigious flow of essays and book reviews, many of which he signed with pseudonyms such as: B, D, F, G, H, X, J, and David.³ These writings provide additional insight into the mind of Georges Sorel, for as Georges Goriely observed, " . . . nous pouvons y suivre sa pensée en plein effort."⁴

The first issue of le Devenir social, subtitled "Revue internationale d'économie histoire et de philosophie," appeared in April, 1895. Suggestive of the tone of this new periodical was a quotation from Karl Marx which was reprinted on the title page each of the ensuing issues and stated that: "le mode de production de la vie matérielle domine en générale le développement de la vie

³Sorel published a monthly review of Italian books under the name "David" after Marie-David. See also Pierre Andreu, Notre Maitre M. Sorel, p. 56, and Le pluralisme dramatique, p. 83.

⁴Le pluralisme dramatique, p. 84. " . . . we are able to follow there his thought in full effort."

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sociale, politique et intellectuelle."⁵ Contributors to this April, 1895, issue included: Enrico Ferri, Karl Kautsky, Antonio and Arturo Labriola, and several others including, of course, Georges Sorel whose essay entitled "Les théories de M. Durkheim" appeared on page one.

Les Théories De M. Durkheim

Georges Sorel was interested in Emile Durkheim's thesis on the division of labor which Durkheim had propagated in 1893 at which time he was a professor of sociology and a member of the faculté des lettres de Bordeaux. In 1895, Emile Durkheim published Les règles de la méthode sociologique which was, according to Sorel, a statement of the essential parts of Durkheim's doctrines.⁶ Though dissatisfied with Durkheim for having " . . . se prononce, avec une grande force, contre le socialisme," Sorel did not conceal his respect for this " . . . théoricien, qui est, à la fois, un métaphysicien d'une subtilité rare et un savant parfaitement armé pour la lutte."⁷

⁵The reference for this quote was simply: "Karl Marx, Le Capital."

⁶Emile Durkheim, Les règles de la méthode sociologique (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1895). (Hereinafter referred to as Les regles.)

⁷Georges Sorel, "Les théories de M. Durkheim," Le Devenir social, No. 1 (April, 1895), 1, 2. (Hereinafter referred to as "Les théories.") " . . . theoretician who is at the same time a metaphysician of a rare subtlety and a scholar perfectly armed for the struggle."

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According to Sorel, Durkheim sought to discover empirical relationships founded on an examination of verifiable facts to serve as the basis of generalizations about sociological conditions. Morality for Durkheim, Sorel wrote, was attached to an empirical notion of frequency: ". . . il a fondé sa morale, en grande partie, sur l'appréciation du degré de généralité."⁸ Thus, sociology, as understood by Durkheim, according to Sorel, no longer claimed to determine the nature of society and its institutions; it took things as they were and attempted to study their changes. This study was conducted in an empirical manner and the new school of sociology, Sorel said, was content to discover proximate rules. This investigation of sociological phenomena showed, Sorel wrote: ". . . l'étonnante régularité avec laquelle ils se reproduisent dans les même circonstances."⁹ But Sorel objected to this type of quantitative analysis because he believed that it falsely assumed homogeneity: "En sociologie, il n'y a aucune raison pour supposer que des phénomènes éloignés les uns des autres dans le temps

⁸Ibid., p. 4. ". . . he founded his morality, for the most part, on the appreciation of the degree of generality."

⁹Quoted from Les règles, p. 117, by Sorel in "Les théories," p. 9. ". . . the astonishing regularity with which they reproduce themselves under the same circumstances."

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et l'espace soient homogènes."¹⁰ The authors of such research, Sorel charged, construe their observations according to their personal opinions. This caused a tendency, he noted, to consider as most general, ideas which were most familiar. He wrote: "C'est la cause de presque toutes nos erreurs dans l'investigation scientifique."¹¹ In Sociology, Sorel believed, the goal was not to search for numerical relationships alone; instead it was necessary, he thought, to know the general dispositions and principle qualities of social movements. Sorel believed that statistics had a great importance to sociology though not an unqualified importance: ". . . mais à la condition qu'on les emploie dans un esprit vraiment scientifique, qu'on les interprète comme des signes secondaires et qu'on ne prétende pas en faire la base d'une sociologie algébrique."¹² Thus, Sorel concluded, if the approach of

¹⁰Sorel, "Les théories," p. 13. "In sociology, there is no reason to suppose that phenomena distant from each other in time and space are homogeneous."

¹¹Ibid., p. 14. "It is the cause of nearly all of our errors in scientific investigation."

¹²Ibid., p. 168. Sorel added an interesting comparison: "Il est manifeste que tous les hommes ne participent pas également aux mouvements; il y en a qui font les lois, qui gouvernent, administrent, dirigent les industries, agissent sur les marchés;--il y en a d'autres qui obéissent et sont réduits à un rôle passif, sinon servile. Il est impossible de mêler tous ces groupes et d'en faire une masse facticement homogène, pas plus qu'il n'est raisonnable de considérer les températures et compositions moyennes dans un mélange très compliqué

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Durkheim were accepted, if sociology adopted a nomenclature borrowed from physics, it must be cautioned that there was more to be known about movements than general characteristics and tendencies: it was vital, Sorel believed, to determine the tensions of these groups as well as their density and their masses.¹³

In spite of his criticisms, Sorel stated that he strongly admired the scientific inclination which he saw in Emile Durkheim. Sorel thought that Durkheim had made a truly important discovery in the utilization of the concept of frequency which " . . . a ouvert à la sociologie empirique une voie féconde."¹⁴ He concluded his essay with the hope that Durkheim might yet find his way to the acceptance of Karl Marx: " . . . ce serait pour la philosophie sociale un heureux événement; je serais le premier à acclamer en lui mon maître."¹⁵

de gaz réagissant les uns sur les autres." Ibid. " . . . but in the condition that they are employed in a truly scientific spirit, that they are interpreted as secondary signs and that we don't try to make of them the base of an algebraic sociology."

¹³In a footnote Sorel stated that "clearly these groups are more or less ardent; this characteristic neglected by Durkheim has always been placed in evidence by historians." "Les théories," p. 168.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 175. " . . . has opened to empirical sociology a fruitful path."

¹⁵Ibid., p. 180. " . . . this would be for social philosophy a happy event; I would be the first to proclaim him my master."

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The Psychological Laws of Symbolism

In June, 1895, Georges Sorel wrote a review of a book by M. G. Ferrero entitled The Psychological Laws of Symbolism.¹⁶ "M. Ferrero," Sorel wrote in le Devenir social, "is one of the most ingenious philosophers of our time."¹⁷ Sorel's high regard for Ferrero was partially due to a definition which they shared of the role of the scientist in the contemporary world. Ferrero had written that "C'est un devoir moral de l'homme de science de s'exposer à commettre des erreurs--pour que la science avance toujours. . . ." ¹⁸ Sorel admired Ferrero's disdain for the false vanity of the savants: "Cette théorie place les raisons de la science bien au-dessus de la misérable vanité et du mesquin amour-propre du savant."¹⁹

In addition to his admiration of Ferrero's definition of the role of the scientist, Sorel believed that

¹⁶G. Ferrero, Les lois psychologiques du Symbolisme (Paris: Alcan éditeur, 1895). (Hereinafter referred to as Les lois psychologiques.)

¹⁷Georges Sorel, "Les lois psychologiques du Symbolisme," le Devenir social, No. 3 (June, 1895), 275. (Hereinafter referred to as "Les lois.")

¹⁸Ibid. "It is the moral duty of the men of science to expose himself to commit some errors--in order that science advances always."

¹⁹Ibid. "This theory places the reasons of science well above miserable vanity and the petty pride of the scholar."

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this study of symbolism represented what he called " . . . one of the first serious attempts to provide a psychological interpretation of history."²⁰ The role played by symbols in history was of such interest to Sorel that he emphasized the value of even the " . . . hypothèses tempéraires et de synthèses prématurées . . . "²¹ which Ferrero had advanced. The evolution of human institutions, according to Sorel's interpretation of Ferrero, did not follow the abstract laws of logic, and to understand the past it was necessary to reject the purely logical approach. To this end Ferrero advanced an hypothesis which he called the "Loi de l'inertie logique" which according to Sorel " . . . a une importance capitale dans l'histoire."²² Ferrero had stated, Sorel noted, that pure logic was originally preferred to observation and experience because it was a " . . . processus psychologique moins fatigant."²³ Human institutions were not created according to a preconceived plan; they did not, according to Sorel's account of Ferrero, follow a

²⁰Ibid., p. 279.

²¹Ibid. " . . . temporary hypotheses and premature synthèses . . . "

²²Ibid., p. 277. " . . . had a capital importance in history."

²³Sorel quoted from Les lois psychologiques, p. 162. " . . . a less fatiguing psychological process."

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single idea and there was no clear understanding of the final results to which human activity would lead. Such activity originated as provisional expedient which was subject to a slow evolution, with the result that, according to Ferrero, man " . . . ne comprend pas dans son ensemble ce qu'il a créé peu à peu par des modifications successives."²⁴ Thus in the course of time, the inventions of man took on symbolic values which were capable of provoking the birth of certain states of consciousness whose intensity was determined by the degree to which the symbol conformed to the psychological laws which governed human consciousness. The psychological laws which Ferrero discussed were premature according to Sorel, and at the conclusion of his essay Sorel complained that Ferrero had not sought the nature of this excitation caused by symbols and Sorel's continuing

²⁴Sorel quoted from Les lois psychologiques, p. 166. Sorel remarked that Ferrero may have neglected too much the role of reason in symbolic transformations: "Il est regrettable aussi que M. Ferrero n'ait pas tenu plus compte de ce que Hegel a écrit sur le symbolisme et sur son opposition avec l'adaptation des moyens aux fins," Les lois psychologiques du Symbolisme, p. 275. Sorel shared with Hegel a conception also of the role which art played in the development of science: "La conception hegelienne est toujours vraie: l'art est un intermédiaire entre la nature et la science." le Devenir social, No. 2 (Mai, 1895). "Les premières formes de la religion et de la tradition dans l'Inde et la Grèce," P. Regnaud, Revue Critique par Georges Sorel, p. 195. " . . . doesn't understand in its totality that which he has created little by little by successive modifications."

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interest in the emotional dimension of human behavior again surfaced: ". . . il me semble que cette excitation est d'ordre affectif."²⁵

Psychologie Des Foules

In addition to the emotional impact of symbols, Georges Sorel became interested in the psychology of crowds after having read and critically examined a book written by Gustave LeBon entitled Psychologie des Foules in 1895.²⁶ According to Sorel's understanding of LeBon, the individual within a crowd underwent striking changes: "L'individu en foule acquiert, par le seul fait du nombre, un sentiment de force invincible qui lui permet de céder à des instincts que seul il eût forcément réprimés."²⁷ According to LeBon, Sorel reported, the individual in a crowd became a more primitive being, capable of spontaneity, violence, ferocity, heroism, and great enthusiasm. And in the center of a crowd, Sorel reported from LeBon: ". . . le savant et l'ignorant sont également incapables

²⁵Sorel, "Les lois," p. 276. ". . . it seems to me that this excitation is of an affective nature."

²⁶Gustave LeBon, Psychologie des Foules (Paris: F. Alcan, editeur, 1865). Reviewed by Sorel in le Devenir social, No. 8 (Novembre, 1895). (Hereinafter referred to as "Psychologie des Foules.")

²⁷Ibid., p. 765. "The individual in a crowd acquires, by the single fact of number, a feeling of invincible force which permits him to yield to instincts which he alone had forcibly repressed."

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d'observation."²⁸ Crowds are susceptible only to ideas, Sorel continued, having " . . . revêtir une forme très simple . . . pour les conduire, il faut employer une logique spéciale; elles ne sont vraiment pas influencables par un raisonnement."²⁹ The conceptions of the crowd, Sorel added, take on a religious character; and he believed that this religiosity characterized the faith which crowds could place in formula or in their leaders-- a religiosity which explained their intolerance, their fanaticism and their blind submission.³⁰

Sorel found the most fundamental aspect of crowd psychology to be the sense of " . . . l'impuissance intellectuelle," in which condition he believed the individual lost little by little all the "artificial" supports of education. The first of these to fall, Sorel noted, was " . . . l'idée de responsabilité."³¹

²⁸Ibid., p. 766. " . . . the scholar and the ignorant are equally incapable of observation."

²⁹Ibid. " . . . to recloth a very simple form . . . in order to lead them, it is necessary to employ a special logic. They are truly not influenced by reasoning."

³⁰These ideas are largely credited to G. LeBon, Psychologie des Foules, pp. 61, 54, 61, 62. Sorel added: "Cette domination des instincts, ce retour aux formes sauvages peuvent être . . . bien il y a surexcitation de la vie affective." Psychologie des Foules, p. 766.

³¹Ibid., p. 767. " . . . the idea of responsibility."

Sorel referred in this regard to the "petit stock de formules" which, he believed, education had provided, and he charged that these formula were empty abstractions. Sorel found here an application for what he called " . . . une loi psychologique très importante . . . c'est la loi de la permanence des abstraits."³² Under " . . . l'influence magique des mots," Sorel charged, the minds of children were weakened by the educators "surtout dans les races Latines."³³ But the individual in a crowd was not susceptible, Sorel noted, to subtle distinctions of language; the example of action was more persuasive than words alone because, Sorel claimed, " . . . l'action est plus près de l'expression émotionnelle que ne l'est la parole."³⁴

In political life, Sorel observed, individuals do not present themselves as they truly are, each wears a mask and for this reason parliaments do not resemble crowds. In parliaments, Sorel discovered, the domain of the word from which resulted " . . . de mensonges et de conventions," and he concluded his review of LeBon's

³²Ibid. " . . . a very important psychological law . . . it is the law of the permanence of abstracts."

³³Ibid. " . . . the magical influence of words . . . especially the Latin races."

³⁴Ibid., p. 769. " . . . action is closer to emotional expression than the word."

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book by charging that " . . . notre éducation nous prépare à jouer la comédie et tue notre initiative."³⁵

By December, 1895, le Devenir social had issued its ninth monthly publication. Georges Sorel had been a heavy contributor with three major articles and thirteen detailed book reviews.³⁶ Writing to Croce in December, 1895, he described the difficulty of sustaining the fledgling publication with articles of continuing interest.³⁷ Sorel asked Croce to contribute " . . . des études précises sur des faits historiques ou des phénomènes économiques bien délimités."³⁸

La Science Dans L'Education

In February, 1896, Sorel wrote a major article for le Devenir social entitled "la Science dans l'éducation" in which he again criticized the assumptions of

³⁵ Ibid., p. 770. " . . . our education prepares us to play the comedy and kills our initiative."

³⁶ See Appendix A for a complete listing of Sorel's contributions to le Devenir social, 1895.

³⁷ Sorel concealed his heavy participation in le Devenir social by signing his articles often with a variety of initials.

³⁸ diretta da B. Croce, "Lettere Di Georges Sorel a B. Croce," la Critica, Vol. XXV, 1927 (December 20, 1895), 38. (Hereinafter referred to as la Critica.) An essay was submitted by Croce entitled "Les theories historiques de M. Loria" in le Devenir social, November, 1896, pp. 881-906. " . . . some precise studies on historical facts or well delimited economic phenomena."

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the French educational system. Chiding the sons of "familles nobles" who could permit themselves the luxury of seeking in education a preparation for "la vie de salon," Sorel charged that their only industry was to become perfect "gentilhommes," and he added scornfully: ". . . leurs parents ont raison de les élèver pour une profession qui doit être si lucrative."³⁹ This education designed to teach manners, to inculcate a taste for literature was, according to Sorel, designed for the student who wished to present a "belle figure dans le monde," but was useless to those who had no prospects that ". . . ils trouveront sur leur chemin de riches héritières qui leur apporteront des millions en échange de leur gentilhommerie."⁴⁰

Sorel believed that the concept of education comprehended all of Sociology because at each instant what he called "le milieu artificiel" acted upon the individual with the effect of modifying experience and personality. Addressing himself to the schools of his day, Sorel stressed that contemporary conditions were

³⁹ Georges Sorel, "la Science dans l'education," le Devenir social, No. 2 (Fevrier, 1896), 110. (Herein-after referred to as "la Science dans l'education.")
". . . their parents are right to raise them for a profession which must be so lucrative."

⁴⁰ Ibid. ". . . they will find on their path of riches heiresses who will bring them millions in exchange for their gentle manliness."

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greatly changed from those of the past. Yet, he complained, a great labor remained before the present system would be able to liberate itself from the educational ideas of pre-revolutionary France which were " . . . fondé sur la supériorité de la culture romaine."⁴¹ The old system had failed in the present, Sorel believed, because people were graduating from the colleges insufficiently prepared for life: their general knowledge did not prepare them for a role in industrial society and this lack of harmony was critical because: "Un système éducatif ne vaut qu'en raison de son harmonie avec une organisation donnée."⁴²

In the realm of human knowledge, Sorel, in his essay on science in education, distinguished two parts; the first he called formal or abstract, the second he believed was living and concrete. He believed that the prestige which geometry and logic possessed at the beginning of speculative philosophy had led thinkers to believe

⁴¹Ibid., p. 117. Writing on the role of the Christian Church in the maintenance of this idea, Sorel noted that it had transmitted two things to the successive generations: some rudiments of ancient philosophy and the preconception of " . . . la supériorité intellectuelle incontestée du monde païen sur la société du temps. Des ces deux choses, c'est la seconde qui est la plus importante." p. 116." . . . founded on the superiority of the Roman culture."

⁴²Ibid., p. 111. "An educational system is worthwhile by reason of its harmony with a given organization."

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that a science was all the more perfect when it included a great number of abstractions and syllogismes.⁴³ It was this abstract and formal point of view which, according to Sorel, formerly dominated all scientific instruction. But it was necessary, Sorel believed, to understand that scientific relationships belonged " . . . au milieu artificiel et non au milieu cosmique."⁴⁴ Science had become, Sorel wrote, " . . . un admirable système de ruses destinées à mesurer indirectement ce que nous ne pouvons mesurer directement."⁴⁵ This doctrine was, according to Sorel, " . . . une hypothèse anthropocentrique."⁴⁶ The formal part of science, he believed, had acquired an importance of such magnitude that it had almost separated itself from the philosophy of nature. This development rested upon, Sorel wrote: " . . . du

⁴³Sorel, in a footnote, said that this was especially manifest in the transcendental idealism of Kant. Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 136. " . . . to the artificial milieu and not to the cosmic milieu."

⁴⁵Ibid. " . . . an admirable system of ruses destined to measure indirectly that which we cannot measure directly."

⁴⁶Ibid. Sorel also charged that some "wise" authors claimed that the definition of morality was that which was of an entirely human design " . . . et on sait que le morale est l'ensemble des règles que doivent suivre les hommes pour rendre l'exploitation capitaliste supportable." p. 137. " . . . an anthropocentric hypothesis."

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fanatisme intellectualiste."⁴⁷ In contemporary education, Sorel believed, the "true" was defined as an ensemble of very clear and distinct propositions closely bound together by logic, capable of being applied to the phenomena of the world, as made known to the senses aided by man-made instruments.⁴⁸ The "real," according to Sorel, was outside of this ensemble and thus not susceptible to any exact science.

Concerning metaphysics, Sorel observed that ". . . metaphysiciens anciens et moderne ne jamais poser de problèmes sur le monde réel, mais sur un monde purement subjectif plus parfait."⁴⁹ But in nature, Sorel believed, there existed a complexity so extraordinary and so little decipherable that one always allowed for chance,

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 216. ". . . some intellectual fanaticism."

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid. Here Sorel made reference to M. Ferrero's idea that "man is inclined toward logical constructions by the laziness of his mind, or the desire to devote the least possible effort to research," p. 217. See also previous discussion of lois psychologique du symbolisme, M. G. Ferrero. Sorel disagreed with this hypothesis somewhat saying: ". . . il faut tenir compte, dans une très large mesure, de ce sentiment de subjectivisme, qui nous fait aimer et venerer, les produits de notre esprit," "la Science dans l'Education," p. 217. ". . . ancient and modern metaphysicians never posed problems about the real world but about a world purely subjective and most perfect."

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and he believed it was precisely this element of chance which was repugnant to the habits of the men of abstract science. Their dogmatic states of mind led, according to Sorel, to the formation of utopian ideas in the social realm and to " . . . la purgation complète des systèmes sociaux, l'élimination de tout ce qui est obscur, imparfait, inintelligible telle est l'oeuvre qui semble possible depuis deux siècles, depuis que l'homme ne cesse plus d'admirer les produits de son esprit et les victoires qu'il remporte sur la matière."⁵⁰ In his day, Sorel believed that sociologists had become a little less ambitious but he warned that a serious self-examination would reveal a sleeping utopian in all contemporary sociologists; in fact, according to Sorel, a kind of structural error seemed to dominate human minds: " . . . nous ne pouvons comprendre la réalité du réel qu'en la subordonnant à l'existence des caprices de notre imagination manipulant le formel."⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 219. Sorel concluded that the scientific education had exercised a great influence on the development of utopian social thought. " . . . the complete purging of social systems, the elimination of all which is obscure, imperfect, unintelligible, such is the work which seems possible since two centuries, since man no longer ceases to admire the products of his spirit and the victories that he achieves on matter."

⁵¹Ibid., p. 221. " . . . we can only understand the reality of the real in subordinating it to the existence of caprices of our imagination manipulating the formal."

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This structural error was not, Sorel believed, inherent in human nature. And it was here, he thought, that education could intervene to expose our stupidity but he concluded: ". . . malheureusement, c'est plutôt le contraire qui se produit, parce que l'enseignement est entièrement fondé sur le formel."⁵² The success of utopian ideas was tied very closely to sentimental affinities: "Comme toujours, on trouve au fond de ces mouvements de l'esprit un élément affectif."⁵³ And Sorel ascribed much of the success of Fourier to artifices of language: ". . . il était donné d'un talent très remarquable pour trouver des expressions imagées, symboliques. . . ." ⁵⁴ Is this not usually the case, he asked? Does not the form often prevail over the content?⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid. Sorel recalled that after 1870 the republican party of France saw its mission to give France the "benefits" of a purely scientific education and that Gambetta had declared that Comte: "a donné la philosophie scientifique de la République," p. 223. ". . . unhappily, it is rather the contrary which produces itself, because teaching is entirely founded on the formal."

⁵³Ibid. Sorel found this element very active in Fourier. "As always, we find at the base of these movements of spirit an affective element."

⁵⁴Ibid. ". . . he was given a very remarkable talent for finding vivid expressions, symbolic . . . "

⁵⁵Sorel stated the principle: "la forme l'a emporte sur le fond," Ibid., p. 233.

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The impact of reading new words, he observed, created the illusion that one was in the presence of extraordinary new novelties, and this, Sorel charged, was one of the consequences of the emphasis on the formal and abstract in education.⁵⁶

Sorel believed that a truly scientific education could only be given when theory and practice could become united. This unity was, Sorel noted, a central theme in the work of Karl Marx. The liberation of mankind, Sorel wrote: ". . . comporte, comme première condition, une idéelle identification de la matière et de l'esprit dans le milieu artificiel, une complète intelligibilité de toute opération, une parfaite illumination du monde économique par la pensée."⁵⁷

L'Idéalisme De M. Brunetière

A doctrine of Socialism was stated by Sorel in another essay written in 1896 for le Devenir social

⁵⁶In a footnote Sorel noted: "Cette déformation peut avoir l'avantage de faire voir très nettement certains phénomènes qui restent ordinairement peu accessibles aux observateurs," Ibid., p. 233.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 457. ". . . requires, as a first condition, an ideal identification of matter and spirit in the artificial milieu, a complete intelligibility of every operation, a perfect illumination of the economic world by thought."

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entitled "l'idéalisme de M. Brunetière."⁵⁸ The socialists are materialists, he admitted, in the sense that they did not believe in the march of humanity toward " . . . la Lumière divine, vers l'Esprit, ou toute autre expression de l'actualité de la Vérité et de la Justice."⁵⁹ In saying this, Sorel did not wish to deny the highly idealistic character of the socialist doctrine, but he cautioned against the false prophecy of the future based solely on imagination. According to Sorel, Marx saw the economic forms not as a resistance but as precisely that which caused successive protests, which for the sake of convenience were classified under the general term "justice." But the general terms of justice and truth did not, he believed, exist outside of the world which was constructed by mankind in its successive labors.

Etude Sur Vico

In October, 1896, Georges Sorel completed, for le Devenir social, a detailed study of the seventeenth century Italian philosopher of law and of cultural history, Giambattista Vico. Sorel was highly interested

⁵⁸The essay appeared in le Devenir social, No. 6, Juin, 1896, "L'idéalisme de M. Brunetière," Georges Sorel, pp. 500-16. (Hereinafter referred to as "L'idéalisme de M. Brunetière.")

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 516. " . . . the divine Light, toward Spirit, or all other expressions of the reality of the Truth and of Justice."

in what had seemed to Vico an incontestable truth of history, whose apprehension could help to clarify the origins of history which otherwise would remain obscure. That law was simply: "Le monde social est certainement l'ouvrage des hommes."⁶⁰ Sorel believed that this conception of the construction of history by man, constituted the original part of the work of Vico. The other conception popularly associated with the work of Vico, the conception of an ideal history with an eternal succession of political forms, Sorel chided as a superficial accessory and an obstacle to an appreciation of Vico's value.⁶¹

According to Sorel in his essay on Vico, Karl Marx noted that Darwin had drawn attention to the history of " . . . la technologie naturelle," meaning by this the formation of the organs of plants and animals considered as means of production for their lives.⁶² Marx then asked, according to Sorel, would not the history of

⁶⁰ Georges Sorel, "Étude sur vico," le Devenir social, No. 10 (Octobre, 1896), 809. "The social world is certainly the work of men."

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 786. Sorel wrote: "Mais pour apprécier toute la valeur des thèses, auxquelles Marx fait allusion, il faut débarrasser, tout d'abord, le chemin des obstacles; il faut enlever toutes les parties superficielles du système, surtout celle qui est la plus connue, mais qui est accessoire."

⁶² Ibid.

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the productive organs of social human life be worthy of similar researches? And had not, Sorel asked, Vico observed that the history of man distinguished itself from the history of nature in that man had made the former and not the latter? Because of his interest in science, Vico was, according to Sorel, very struck by the social and historical nature of human development. Sorel wrote:

Une chose frappe fortement Vico: la science n'est pas née d'hier; elle a une histoire derrière elle; c'est en consultant cette histoire, qu'on peut seulement la bien connaître. Elle n'est pas un objet qui réclame la croyance ou l'adhésion personnelle; elle intéresse la vie de l'homme comme espèce et la développement de l'humanité; elle n'est pas individuelle, elle est sociale. . . . 63

Sorel agreed with Vico. For him science represented an immense labor of cooperation among successive generations. From this perspective Sorel respected the authority of tradition: ". . . il n'est donc pas conforme à la raison de négliger l'autorité de la tradition: celle-ci doit être étudiée et discutée."⁶⁴ Sorel believed

⁶³ Ibid., p. 812. Sorel added: "Voilà une belle pensée qui peut entrer telle quelle dans la philosophie moderne."

One thing strongly struck Vico: science was not born yesterday; it has a history behind it; it is only in consulting this history that one can know it well. It is not a thing which demands belief or personal adherence; it interests the life of man as species and the development of humanity; it is not individual, it is social. . . .

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 813. ". . . thus it is not conformed to reason to neglect the authority of tradition: this [tradition] must be studied and discussed."

that the intellectual worked with material which had been furnished by preceding generations and this material, Sorel reiterated, " . . . appartient à ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui le milieu artificiel; c'est donc dans un milieu fait par l'humanité que nous pratiquons l'induction et non dans le milieu cosmique."⁶⁵ The new science of Vico was thus for Sorel a history of human ideas, " . . . d'après laquelle semble devoir procéder la métaphysique de l'esprit humain."⁶⁶ In this evolution of the human mind, Sorel insisted: "Nous ne sortons jamais du milieu artificiel; la connaissance se perfectionne suivant la loi de progression métaphysique, propre à l'esprit humain; mais elle reste toujours sociale comme aujourd'hui l'humanité est son oeuvre à elle-même."⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 814. " . . . belongs to that which we call today the artificial milieu; it is thus in a milieu made by humanity that we practice induction and not in the cosmic milieu."

⁶⁶Ibid. " . . . from which seems ought to proceed the metaphysic of human spirit."

⁶⁷Ibid. Sorel whose knowledge of Vico was based on a translation of his works by Michelet (in the edition of 1894) referred to "le grand historien français" who had a very high regard for Vico and wrote: " . . . la science sociale date au jour où cette grande idée a été exprimée pour la première fois. Jusque là l'humanité croyait devoir ses progrès aux hasards du génie individuel." Quoted by Sorel in a footnote, pp. 814-15. "We will never get out of the artificial milieu; knowledge perfects itself following the law of metaphysic progression, appropriate to human spirit; but it always remains social as today humanity is its work to itself."

Sorel believed that what he called "le monde cosmique" could never be known by mankind in any certainty. But mankind could know "le monde artificiel," because it was constructed by human beings. Quoting from Marx, Sorel noted: "La technologie met à nu le mode d'action de l'homme vis-à-vis de la nature, le procès de production de sa vie matérielle et, par suite, l'origine des rapports sociaux et des idées ou conceptions intellectuelles qui en découlent."⁶⁸

To comprehend the meaning of Vico, Sorel believed, it was necessary to become aware of the special conditions in which he lived; to take into account what Sorel called the "milieu intellectuel" in which his mind was formed. In this regard, Sorel noted, ". . . on doit surtout remarquer, dans Vico, l'éloignement qu'il éprouve pour les thèses purement intellectualistes et spiritualistes qui dominaient alors toute la pensée européenne."⁶⁹ Vico, according to Sorel, was especially antagonistic toward

⁶⁸Sorel referred this idea to Capital, Karl Marx in an incomplete reference. "Technology makes naked the mode of action of man with regard to nature, the process of production of his material life, and consequently, the origin of social relations and intellectual ideas or conceptions which flow from it."

⁶⁹Sorel, "Étude sur Vico," p. 810. ". . . we must, above all, notice in Vico, the distance he felt for purely intellectual and spiritual theses which dominated at the time all European thought."

the doctrines of René Descartes,⁷⁰ whose thinking, Sorel noted, represented " . . . des tendances, depuis longtemps, latentes dans le monde."⁷¹ Sorel believed that what he called the "conceptions spiritualistes" of Descartes, especially that of dualism, had substituted in the eighteenth century for the " . . . ancienne théorie unitaire de l'homme."⁷² The result of this had been the conception of an isolated intelligence reasoning only on itself. Vico strongly attacked the Cartesian doubt which, " . . . semblait à Vico un véritable leurre."⁷³ This appeal to individual sentiment was a pretention to reconstruct, by a single individual, that which the preceding generations had elaborated in an enormous collective human undertaking. Vico, Sorel reported, had seen

⁷⁰Sorel noted the agreement of Michelet with "l'illustre Napolitain": "Nulle part, les abus de la nouvelle philosophie n'ont été attaqués avec plus de force et de modération: l'éloignement pour les études historique, le dédain du sens commun de l'humanité, la manière de réduire en art ce qui doit être laissé à la prudence individuelle, l'application de la méthode géométrique aux choses qui comportent le moins une démonstration rigoureuse . . ." Sorel's reference here was simply Michelet, Discours sur le système et la vie de Vico, p. 14, in "Etude sur Vico," p. 810.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 811. " . . . tendencies, since a long time, latent in the world."

⁷²Ibid. " . . . the former unitary theory of man."

⁷³Ibid. " . . . seemed to Vico a veritable lure."



in this new school the potential destruction of all science and Vico scorned the concept of the clear and distinct idea: ". . . l'expérience avait montré déjà qu'entre cartésiens eux-mêmes, l'idée claire et distincte pour l'une est souvent pour l'autre obscur et confusé."⁷⁴

Vico was preoccupied with science, Sorel discovered, and especially with the historical nature of accumulated scientific knowledge. It was not by consulting a personal perspective, according to Sorel, that an individual could arrive at an understanding of science because: "Elle n'est pas individuelle, elle est sociale . . . elle intéresse se la vie de l'homme comme espèce et le développement de l'humanité."⁷⁵

Vico had additionally posed what Sorel called "un principe extrêmement fécond." He had taught that the origins of metaphysical constructions must be sought in

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 812. Vico also charged, according to Sorel, that Descartes had ". . . prétendait avoir fait table rase du passé et ses partisans négligèrent la lecture des anciens auteurs; mais lui-même était fort savant." Sorel quoted from a letter by Vico: "Lettre à G. L. Esperti," p. 177, translated by Michelet whose publication of 1894 included "la science nouvelle, l'autobiographie de Vico, and quelques opuscules." This reference appears "Etude sur Vico," pp. 812, 785. ". . . experience has already shown that between cartesians themselves, the clear and distinct idea for one is often obscure and confused for the other."

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 812. "It is not individual, it is social . . . it interests the life of man as species and the development of humanity."

the empirical conditions of social life. And Vico taught that the origins of science could be discovered in the technical observations found in art. Thus Vico, according to Sorel, had recognized the preexistence of "la sagesse vulgaire" when he wrote that "les auteurs des nations sont antérieurs de plus de mille ans aux auteurs des livres."⁷⁶

Vico's estimation of the condition of Europe during the eighteenth century was portentous; Vico observed that the genius of Europe seemed to be exhausted. Vico noted the departure from classical studies which he felt had been so brilliant during the epoch of the Renaissance. The experimental method, Vico observed, was scorned by the eighteenth century: ". . . on ne s'occupe que de rédiger des abrégés et des dictionnaires, pour remplacer les travaux personnels."⁷⁷ In opposition to these trends Vico suggested a new scientific history of the evolution of human ideas whose goal would be to discover their nature, origins and motive forces. Vico

⁷⁶Sorel quoted from Vico, Michelet, Paris, 1894 edition, Book I, chapter IV, p. 364. See "Étude sur Vico," p. 801. "The authors of nations are anterior by more than a thousand years to the authors of books."

⁷⁷"Étude sur Vico," pp. 791-92. In a footnote on page 791 Sorel stated the Vico view that Descartes' success depended upon the ". . . siècle de légèreté dédaigneuse, où l'on veut paraître éclairé sans étude." ". . . they only concerned themselves with writing summaries and dictionnaires, replacing personal works."

failed in this project, Sorel believed, partly because of his reliance upon the intervention of a supernatural force in human history: ". . . la science nouvelle . . . une théologie civile de la providence divine . . . commence et finit par le miracle."⁷⁸ However, Sorel believed that Vico was one of the important thinkers who shared the good fortune that their errors were fruitful, and thus deserved to be studied with great care.

Vico's idea that the formation of philosophy occurred under the influence of practical social forms including economics and politics was so in conformity with Sorel's predispositions in 1896, that he called this speculation a law and gave it a special designation: "L'importance de cette loi est des plus grandes et il y aurait toute une branche de la psychologie à constituer sur cette base; aussi je propose de lui donner le nom de loi idéogénétique de Vico."⁷⁹ But Vico's conception of an eternally repeated cycle was completely rejected by Sorel who believed this conception to be an idealistic fantasy and concluded: "Le mouvement historique ne consiste

⁷⁸"Étude sur Vico," p. 795. Sorel added: "Il parait donc que vico a fort bien vu quel est le fondement métaphysique de son histoire idéale; c'est pour lui le principe providentiel." ". . . the new science . . . a civil theology of divine Providence . . . begins and finishes by the miracle."

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 906. "The importance of this law is the greatest and there would be an entire branch of psychology to constitute on this base also I propose to give it the name ideogenetic law of Vico."

pas dans un développement homogène; on ne peut même pas dire que les causes produisent des effets immédiats, comme en physique: il y a une grande complexité de changements réagissant les uns sur les autres; et l'un des objets les plus considérables de la sociologie est l'étude des retards et des accélérations."⁸⁰

Sorel carefully detailed his own conception of history, and attacked the supernaturalism of those whom he called "idealistic historians." He insisted that history did not proceed according to any abstract or logical formula. "History shows us," he wrote, "decisive persons whose character, tendencies, and genius could be made the object of a special study."⁸¹ The historian could not know the cause which produced a Caesar at a given date, according to Sorel, but an historian could seek the causes which rendered a Caesar decisive in given circumstances. Instead of the uniform cyclical evolution envisioned by Vico, Sorel wrote:

. . . nous avons un enchevêtrement d'évolutions, qui ne sont susceptibles d'aucune définition générale, parce qu'à un instant donné on les trouve à tous les moments de leur développement.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 930-31. "Historical movement does not consist in a homogeneous development one could not even say that causes produce immediate effects, as in Physics: there is a great complexity of changes reacting on each other; and one of the most considered objects of sociology is the study of delays and accelerations."

⁸¹Ibid., p. 937.

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Mais les conditions économiques, les rapports sociaux, tous les complexes historiques agissent sur ces évolutions pour favoriser certains développements.⁸²

Sorel discovered another principle in Vico which he believed to be of such importance that he entitled it the second "loi idéogénétique," and claimed that: "Cette théorie réduirait à néant la prétention des moralistes qui veulent baser la réforme sociale sur l'amélioration morale de l'individu. . . ." ⁸³ This law stated that the constitution of the family under the influence of prevailing political circumstances was the principle source of moral ideas. Thus, for Sorel, social reform could not wait upon the moral reform of the individual; it was rather a precondition of individual morality.

⁸² Ibid., p. 911. Sorel attacked Jean Jaurès who had written in a periodical Jeunesse socialiste (janvier, 1895) an essay entitled "Idéalisme de l'histoire" that ". . . tout le monde est d'accord pour admettre que le mouvement humain a une direction déterminé" (p. 20). Sorel disagreed saying: "Sans doute, par ce procédé on rend l'histoire intelligible, mais on la falsifie . . ." p. 912. In another related statement Sorel wrote: "Nous ne cherchons plus l'unité dans les tendances immanentes de l'homme, que l'on imagine pour donner un corps aux apparences de l'histoire,--mais dans les évolutions psychologiques, qui sont cachées sous le manteau des lois historiques," pp. 913-14.

. . . we have a tangling up of evolutions, which are not susceptible to any general definition, because at a given instant we find them at all moments of their development. But the economic conditions, social relations, all the historic complexes act on these evolutions in order to favor certain developments.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 925. "This theory reduces to nothingness the pretensions of moralists who wish to base social reform on the moral amelioration of the individual. . . ."

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Vico had also noticed a characteristic of the evolution of political institutions which, according to Sorel, demonstrated that when change occurred there was always a preservation of the old in the new. In light of this observation, Sorel concluded, that a state's political institutions were linked with the past, and to this extent he believed that " . . . l'Etat est un être rétrograde."⁸⁴ This connection with the past was a consequence of the compromise which for most men was the more respectable solution to the dynamic agent for change--forces in conflict. But Sorel cautioned, "L'histoire ne montre pas, toujours, des transformations faites par ce procédé transactionnel. . . ." ⁸⁵ Compromise or what Sorel called "la transaction," was, he believed, characterized by a struggle between two minorities in active conflict; compromise, he believed, assured continuity by providing a new synthesis among the competing elements--a synthesis which did not totally disinherit the old or the new. However, Sorel expected that the proletariat in his day could:

. . . arrive à être, dans l'industrie, la seule organisation vivante: s'il ne reste à côté de lui qu'une infinie minorité impuissante et nuisible; s'il ne renferme dans son sein aucune forme

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 931. " . . . the State is a backward being."

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 934. "History does not always show transformations made by this transactional procedure."

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hiérarchique, susceptible de se séparer de sa masse pour former une faction gouvernante; si enfin le développement de la législation sociale l'a pénétré de droit:--la continuité économique et juridique sera assurée sans transaction. On peut même ajouter . . . que la plus grande révolution que l'esprit puisse concevoir sera la plus pacifique.⁸⁶

There was, Sorel believed, another important area of synthesis over which the past maintained a large influence, which Vico had noticed in the longevity of the Hellenic fables and had attributed to the evolution of language. The Greek poems, Vico noted, were "true" histories and had at their origin a serious character. The epoch of the philosophers, according to Sorel, had given interpretations to the fables having no relationship to their historic origins but, Vico had noted the fables provided the philosophers the facility of expressing the most sublime ideas in a language which was consecrated by the authority of poetic wisdom and associated with an ancient religious sanction. By introducing into their dissertations many known fragments, Sorel noted, "les philosophes transportaient à leurs oeuvres une

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 935.

. . . come to be, in industry, the only living organization: if it does not remain beside it an infinite, powerless and harmful minority, if it doesn't close in its breast any hierarchical form, susceptible of separating itself of its mass to form a governing faction; if finally the development of social legislation has penetrated it by right:--the economic and juridic continuity will be assured with transaction. We could even add that the greatest revolution that the spirit can conceive will be the most peaceable.



partie des sentiments que ces fragments avaient évoqués."⁸⁷

From this Sorel concluded that an innovator must seek the means of developing the sympathies of his readers, because, he believed, no philosophic system could become influential solely on the logical value of its arguments:

"Sans doute la foi cherche à se justifier devant la raison, mais les raisons qui les justifient n'auraient aucune valeur s'il n'existait pas des états affectifs profonds donnant de la consistance à un commencement de croyance."⁸⁸

According to Sorel, Vico had discovered a doctrine which could become important in the study of what Sorel called "des interpretations mythologique." Vico had speculated that the thinking process of human beings developed only very recently the facility of reflective thought; originally, Vico noted, it had been impossible to separate "le chose et son simulacre" and therefore figures, images and fictions did not exist because

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 940. "The philosophers conveyed in their works a part of the sentiment that these fragments have evoked."

⁸⁸Ibid. Sorel referred in a footnote to his source for this idea: ". . . lire a ce sujet le chapitre III du troisieme livre de la Croyance de M. J. Payot." "Without a doubt, faith searches to justify itself before reason, but the reasons which justify it would not have any value if they did not exist in the deep emotional states giving to the consistency a beginning of belief."



everything was real in the same degree. Sorel believed that this condition existed in the present, especially in children, and referred to it as "une loi générale de notre imagination créatrice," and he observed that the " . . . permanence d'un pareil préjugé, qui renaît toujours, montre quelle force possède la logique de l'imagination."⁸⁹ Thus for Sorel the "logic of the imagination" was a pre-rational cognitive process. It was impelled by powerful emotional forces and although with the development of rational cognition, which Sorel believed was an accomplishment of the Greek philosophers, a new cognitive process came into being, the "logic of the imagination" remained capable of dominating the human mind. An intense emotional excitation could, Sorel believed, overwhelm the rational facilities to such an extent that man could be dominated by passion--a phenomenon which Sorel thought played a vital role in the lives of children, crowds, and action oriented mass movements. At the conclusion of his study of Vico, Sorel complained of the superficial understanding in his own day of this emotional, pre-rational element in human life and he praised Vico for his insight into this largely unexplored realm, as well as for his recognition of the historical development of

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 1022, 1023. " . . . permanence of a similar prejudice, which is always reborn, shows what force the logic of imagination possesses."



the artificial social and intellectual milieu as being entirely the construction of man as an historical species.

At the conclusion of 1896,⁹⁰ Sorel had worked for two years on le Devenir social. Yet at the beginning of 1897, his prolific writing continued at the same rapid pace. In February, he published an essay entitled "la science de la population"⁹¹ in which he expressed the view that science was not sufficiently advanced to produce an appropriate analysis of population. Concurrently, Sorel reviewed a book by M. J. Payot entitled De la croyance⁹² in which he found a definition of science with strong affinities to his own. According to Payot, science was a collection of methods designed to classify phenomena and to suitably represent that phenomena; science " . . . laisse la réalité hors de ses prises, tout son effort est dirigé vers l'utile et non vers le vrai."⁹³ Science according to this definition, as Sorel understood it, was not a knowledge of what Sorel called the "réel"; science

⁹⁰See Appendix B for a list of Sorel's contributions to le Devenir social for 1896.

⁹¹See Appendix C for a list of Sorel's contributions to le Devenir social for 1897.

⁹²M. J. Payot, De la croyance (Paris: Alcan éditeur, 1896), reviewed by Sorel in le Devenir social, No. é, février, pp. 181-86.

⁹³Ibid., p. 181. " . . . leaves reality outside of its hold, all its effort is directed towards the useful and not towards the true."



was only " . . . un appauvrissement et un symbolisme."⁹⁴

To this extent Sorel believed that science, a human invention belonging to the artificial milieu, " . . . tourne le dos à la réalité, elle est un ensemble de ruses, de subterfuges destinés à dominer le monde, mais non à pénétrer l'essence."⁹⁵ Therefore for man, Sorel believed, the true reality was that realm over which man could effect the greatest voluntary control, and it was in the context of this reality that science could become an expression of the reasoned work of man. Man could thus become aware of his self-made tools and their corresponding developments in a degree of certainty far exceeding that which he can attain concerning what Sorel called the "cosmic milieu," of which the artificial milieu remained a fragmentary aspect.

Sorel's busy writing career was painfully interrupted on April 28, 1897, when, according to an official extract, Marie Euphrase David died at the age of fifty-one. Her death was attested to according to the "Extrait du Registre des Actes de Décès," by Georges Eugène Sorel, who was described as being fifty-one years old and without profession.

⁹⁴Ibid. " . . . an impoverishment and a symbolism."

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 182. " . . . turns its back to reality, it is an ensemble of ruses, of subterfuges intended to dominate the world, but not to penetrate its essence."

APPENDIX A

LE DEVENIR SOCIAL, 1895; CONTRIBUTIONS
BY GEORGES SOREL

Numéro 1 - Avril

"Les théories de M. Durkheim"

Revue critique:

la vie sociale, la morale, et le progrès, by Dr. Julien
Pioger

Numéro 2 - Mai

"les théories de M. Durkheim" (fin)

Revue critique:

Les premières formes de la religion et de la tradition
dans l'Inde et la Grèce, by P. Reynaud

Numéro 3 - Juin

Revue critique:

Les lois psychologiques du symbolisme, Ferrero

Numéro 5 - Aout

Revue critique:

Du travail et de ses conditions, Hector Depasse
Essais et Etudes, E. de Laveleye
la propriété à Rome, en France, en Roumanie; Geblesco

Numéro 6 - Septembre

"la Métaphysique évolutionniste de M. Brunetière"

Revue critique:

L'église et le travail manuel, M. Sabatier

Numéro 7 - Octobre

Revue critique:

Dégénérescence et alcoolisme, Dr. Legrain
Science et Religion, G. de Molinari
Les questions agricoles d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, D. Zolla

Numéro 8 - Novembre

"Superstition socialiste?"

Revue critique:

Psychologie des foules, G. LeBon
L'enseignement élémentaire en Roussillon depuis ses
origins jusqu'au XIX siècle, Ph. Toreilles et E.
Desplanque
Etude sur la chambre du commerce de Guienne, J. A.
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APPENDIX B

LE DEVENIR SOCIAL, 1896: CONTRIBUTIONS
BY GEORGES SOREL

Numéro 1 - Janvier

"Etudes d'économie rurale d'après M. Zolla"

Revue critique:

Annales de L'Institut International de Sociologie, Les
économistes classiques et leur adversaires, R. Schüler

Numéro 2 - Février

"la Science dans l'éducation"

Revue critique:

Problèmes d'économie politique et de statistique, G.
Rumelin
la Femme devant la science contemporaine, J. Loubet

Numéro 3 - Mars

"Progrès et développement"

"la Science dans l'éducation"

Revue critique:

Critique de combat, G. Renard

Numéro 4 - Avril

"la Science dans l'éducation"

Revue critique:

Paradoxes psychologiques, Max Nordan

Numéro 5 - Mai

"la Science dans l'éducation"

Revue critique:

Contre le socialisme, L. Say
Cours d'économie politique, Pareto

Numéro 6 - Juin

"L'idéalisme de M. Brunetière"

Revue critique:

Sélections sociales, De Lapouge

Numéro 7 - Juillet

Revue critique:

le mouvement idéaliste et la réaction contre la science
positive, A. Fouillée

Numéros 8-9 - Août-Septembre

"les sentiments sociaux"

Revue critique:

Del materialimo storico, Antonio Labriola

Annales de l'institut international de Sociologie

Numéro 10 - Octobre

"Etude sur Vico"

"Economie sociale catholique"

Numéro 11 - Novembre

"Etude sur Vico"

"la dépression économique"

Numéro 12 - Décembre

"Etude sur Vico"

Revue critique:

Socialisme et science positive, Ferri

APPENDIX C

LE DEVENIR SOCIAL, 1897: CONTRIBUTIONS
BY GEORGES SOREL

Numéro 1 - Janvier

Revue critique:

Le mécanisme de la vie moderne, G. d'Avenel

Numéro 2 - Février

"la science de la population"

Revue critique:

L'économie de l'effort, Yves Guyot

Le mouvement positiviste et la conception sociologique
du monde, A. Fouillee

De la croyance, J. Payot

L'état comme organisation coercitive de la société
politique, S. Bilicki

Numéro 3 - Mars

Revue critique:

La viriculture, G. de Molinari

Il gergo nei normali, nei degenerati e nei criminali,

A. Neceforo

Numéro 4 - Avril

Revue critique:

Statistique des grèves et de la conciliation, office
du travail

Numéro 5 - Mai

"Contre une critique anarchiste"

Revue critique:

L'Europa grovane, G. Ferrero

Cours d'économie politique, V. Pareto

Il socialismo e la sua tattica, G. Lerda

Numéro 6 - Juin

Revue critique:

L'emploi de la vie, John Lubbock

Numéro 7 - Juillet

"la loi des revenus"

Revue critique:

La questione siciliana degli zolfi, Caruso-Rasa

Numéros 8-9 - Août-Septembre
"Sociologie et suggestion"

Revue critique:

lo sciopero nella vita moderna, F. Virgili

Numéro 10 - Octobre

Revue doctrinale:

Pro e contro il socialismo, Saverio Merlino

APPENDIX D

LE DEVENIR SOCIAL: 1894 - 1897
EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO
BENEDETTO CROCE: 1895 - 1897

20 décembre 1895

" . . . nous avons le défaut, en France, de vouloir regarder les choses de trop haut et de voir à la Napoléon: aujourd'hui il est devenu très dangereux d'opérer ainsi." p. 39

14 janvier 1896

"Je ne suis pas aussi convaincu que vous que l'Utopie de Morus soit une oeuvre politique sérieuse; je pense que c'est une oeuvre renfermant des allusions utiles pour l'histoire. . . . Si les utopistes décrivaient un certain état social, c'était plutôt pour ridiculiser ce qui existait que pour dire ce qu'ils désiraient . . .

J'ai beaucoup goûté votre livre sur l'histoire, qui me montre que l'Italie finit par abandonner le culte de Spencer. En France, il y a encore des gens qui croient à la science de ce "fumiste" (je ne dis pas 'sophiste,' car les sophistes savaient beaucoup.") p. 40

2 juin 1897

" . . . j'ai perdu ma chère et dévouée femme, qui avait été la compagne de 22 ans de travaux et à qui j'étais lié par 'la forza del primo amore.' Son souvenir, je l'espère restera la meilleure partie de moi-même et la vraie âme de ma vie." p. 44

" . . . le marxisme est loin d'être la doctrine et la méthode de Marx; entre les mains des disciples dépourvus de connaissances historiques et de critique philosophique suffisante, le marxisme est devenu une caricature." p. 45

27 décembre 1897

" . . . il me semble que Engels . . . a beaucoup contribué à lancer le matérialisme historique dans la voie de l'évolutionisme, et à en faire une 'dogmatique absolue' . . . c'est ainsi qu'il a introduit la notion du 'facteur décisif'--qu'il a nié l'action de la force immédiate par des arguments d'avocat--qu'il



a exposé l'histoire comme une évolution fatale. . . . Plus d'une fois, il a été ainsi amené à formuler des paradoxes, que nos marxistes ont transformé en dogmes indiscutables." p. 51

" . . . les formules par lesquelles Marx a marqué sa position sont très obscures; mais ce qui me semble surtout obscur c'est la 'méthode dialectique': . . . plus je vois, moins je comprends; . . . je crois aussi que Marx n'a jamais cherché à préciser sa pensée sur ce point. . . . Ne conviendrait-il pas de supprimer cette expression 'la dialectique' et tout ce qui se rapporte à la 'négation de la négation'? . . . Si non, on s'expose à faire de son oeuvre l'origine d'une mythologie fondée sur les 'maladies du langage.'" p. 52

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A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER III

Between 1897 and 1900, the writings of Georges Sorel reveal the extent to which the moral dimension of Socialism had become an element of critical importance to him. His own Syndicalist revision of Marxism which is the opening theme of Chapter III reveals the depth of his rejection of the dogmatic propensities of the Marxists of his day. He also criticized utopian sociologists for their optimistic view of the human condition and insisted that suffering and pain were more fundamental to the human condition and that pessimism was a more valid assumption for social planners. Sorel also exposed in Chapter III his concept of the historical basis of morality and called again for a new morality based on new forms of union between men and women to be based on devotion, reciprocity and respect. He condemned political parties as exploiters of the power of state government and saw in the state a power-center for the domination of the many by the few. Syndicalism was the moral mechanism which could restore the revolutionary dynamic to Marxism, he concluded; and Chapter III ends with

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Sorel calling for the workers' movement to isolate itself from both the contemporary state and its parliamentary parties.

The extracts of the letters to Croce which appear in the appendix to Chapter III and which cover the period 1898 - 1900 amplify Sorel's characteristic revision of Marxism and his support for the anti-dogmatic views of Bernstein in his famous debate with Kautsky over the proper interpretation of Marx.

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CHAPTER III

SYNDICALISM, REVISIONISM AND

MORALITY: 1897 - 1900

L'Avenir Socialiste Des Syndicats

In 1898, Georges Sorel became concerned with what he called the increasing confusion between the theories of Karl Marx and the programs of the various groups which claimed to be Marxist. To this extent Sorel believed the Communist Manifesto had to be used very prudently because of the character of the document which was according to him, " . . . souvent présentés sous une forme symbolique."¹ Sorel noted that the dogmatic use of Marx was often a misrepresentation, and he cautioned that " . . . Il ne faut pas, non plus, croire que tous les fruits du labeur de Marx puissent se résumer en quelques lambeaux de phrases ramassées dans ses oeuvres, réunies en formulaire dogmatique et commentées comme des textes évangéliques

¹Georges Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste des syndicats," L'Humanité nouvelle (Paris: Libraire C. Reinwald, 1898), p. 5. This reference appeared in a footnote in which Sorel discussed M. Labriola's Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l'histoire. (Hereinafter referred to as "L'avenir socialiste.") " . . . often presented under a symbolic form."

par des théologiens."² In place of this religious devotion to aspects of the writings of Marx, Sorel believed, the time had come to undertake an extension of Marx, as well as an examination of the fundamental ideas of Socialism. This work had been undertaken in France, according to Sorel, by the periodical to which he had contributed so heavily between 1895 and 1897, le Devenir social, and yet, Sorel believed, much confusion remained, especially with respect to the conception of historical materialism.

According to Sorel the proper formulation of the doctrine of historical materialism stated that the mode of production of material life dominated, in general, the development of the social, political and intellectual life.³ The more rigid interpretations of this idea, Sorel noted, replaced the word "dominated" with "determined" and thus falsified a concept which Marx had of the interplay between economics and the other realms of human life. Sorel believed that ". . . l'organisation économique doit être considérée, à la fois, comme effet

²Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste," p. 5. ". . . It is not necessary, either, to believe that all the fruits of Marx's labor can be summed up in some scraps (bits) of phrases, gathered in his works, reunited in dogmatic formula, and annotated like evangelical texts by theologians."

³Ibid., p. 6.

et comme cause."⁴ Sorel concluded that the sociological structure could be thought of as an organism whose elements had a certain independence and he advised " . . . il ne faut pas non plus, à l'imitation de quelques ultra marxistes, réduire le droit et la morale à de simples fantômes."⁵

Sorel believed that it was legitimate to compare the history of early Christianity with that of modern Socialism. He speculated that if the Christian church had been simply a school of philosophy advocating a "morale pure" it would have disappeared as a movement. But for Sorel, the Christian church was " . . . une société, travaillant à développer entre ses membres des relations juridiques nouvelles et gouvernant d'après une constitution nouvelle."⁶ Also with respect to contemporary

⁴Ibid., p. 7. In this respect Sorel stated his acceptance of Benedetto Croce's belief that Marx's concept of history was quite close to the theories of Pareto on the interdependence of phenomena. " . . . economic organization must be considered as both cause and effect."

⁵Ibid., p. 8. " . . . it is not necessary either, in the imitation of some ultra marxists to reduce law and morality to simple phantoms."

⁶Ibid., p. 9. Sorel further noted that the proclamation of the Edict of Milan represented in reality " . . . l'existence d'une hiérarchie plus forte que la hiérarchie impériale et institua un Etat dans l'Etat." " . . . a society, working to develop between its members new juridic relations and governing according to a new constitution."

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Syndicalism, Sorel insisted, it was necessary to consider the consequences of syndicalist organizations as a social movement: "Nous allons chercher quelles sont les conséquences de l'organisation syndicale telle qu'elle est pratiquée aujourd'hui et les considérer au point de vue de la préparation."⁷

According to Sorel, Durkheim, whom he considered the most skillful university sociologist of his day, recognized the importance of corporate or federalist social organizations, although Durkheim had insisted that these groups remain " . . . soumises à l'action général de l'Etat."⁸ But for Sorel the state could not become what the Saint-Simonians had called an "administration of things." The nineteenth century had shown, he noted, that all attempts to constitute an administration independent of the interests of factions or parties had failed, and the bourgeois democracy of late nineteenth

⁷Ibid., p. 10. Sorel observed that Marx had correctly noted that all historical movements had been movements of minorities for the profit of minorities to which Sorel added: "Cette loi empirique s'explique facilement quand on se rappelle ce qu'a été la possession de l'Etat dans l'histoire moderne." "We are going to search for the consequences of syndical organization such as it is practiced today and consider them from the point of view of preparation."

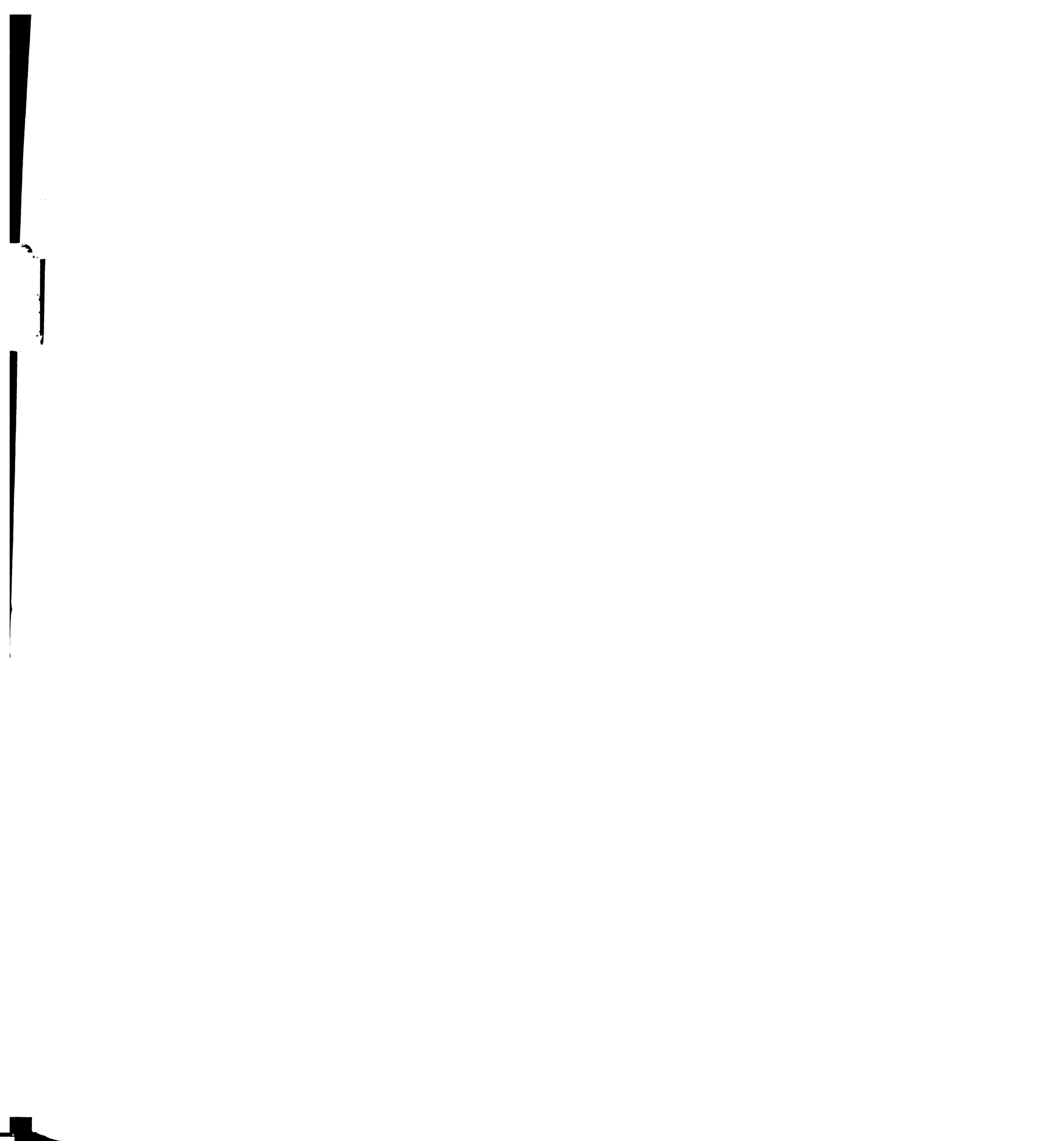
⁸Ibid. Sorel's reference here is incomplete; he merely cited: le Suicide, Etude de sociologie, p. 439. " . . . submitted to the general action of the state."

century France was for Sorel an example of the degree to which professional politicians became corrupted by special interests.⁹

Sorel observed further that the distinction between intellectual and manual labor was entirely arbitrary and politically dangerous, especially when that distinction became qualitative, as he believed it had in his time. The state or the public power, Sorel charged, was based on this claimed superiority of the intellectuals whose corrupt elitism was a threat to the workers movement. The solution for the worker, he advised, was to develop its own internal organization and to avoid coming under the domination of a state whose professional leadership had become corrupt, exploitative and opportunistic. In France, Sorel claimed, the intellectuals such as Jaurès,

. . . prétendent que leur vraie place est dans le Parlement et que le pouvoir dictatorial leur reviendrait de plein droit en cas de succès.

⁹Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste," pp. 101, 11, 12. In an especially scornful statement Sorel wrote: "La démocratie bourgeoise se raccroche, avec l'énergie du désespoir, à la théorie des capacités et s'efforce d'utiliser le respect superstitieux que le peuple a instinctivement pour la science;--elle emploie les moyens les plus charlatanesques pour rehausser son prestige, multiplie les brevets et s'efforce de transformer le moindre lettré en un mandarin;--les parasites se distinguent par un enthousiasme immodéré pour la science afin de jeter de la poudre aux yeux, se mettent à la remorque de grands pontifes scientifiques, leur servent de hérauts, réclament pour eux de grasses pensions, espérant obtenir ainsi la considération des gens naïfs et en tirer profit," p. 13.



C'est contre cette dictature représentative du prolétariat que protestent les syndicaux; ils pensent que cela était tout autre chose que la dictature du prolétariat.¹⁰

The true vocation of the intellectuals, Sorel concluded, was the exploitation of politics; they want, he wrote, " . . . persuader aux ouvriers que leur intérêt est de les porter au pouvoir et d'accepter la hiérarchie des capacités, qui met les travailleurs sous la direction des hommes politiques."¹¹ But Sorel warned the syndicats must recognize that if the worker accepts the guidance of those outside of the productive corporation he will remain incapable of governing himself and exploitation will continue, though perhaps under a different terminology.

The task of transforming the masses of proletariat into a self-conscious class required according to Sorel an " . . . immense travail de decomposition et reposition."¹² This transformation, Sorel thought, must be

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 15.
 . . . pretend that their true place is in Parliament and that the dictatorial power in full right would return to them in case of success. It is against this representative dictatorship of the proletariat that the syndicals protested; they thought that was entirely another thing than the dictatorship of the proletariat.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 16. " . . . to persuade to the workers that their interest is to carry them to power and to accept the hierarchy of capacities, which put workers under the direction of political men."

¹² Ibid., p. 17. " . . . an immense work of decomposition and reposition."

produced by the proletariat itself: " . . . c'est dans le sein du prolétariat, c'est un moyen de ses ressources propres, que doit se créer le droit nouveau."¹³ The proletariat, Sorel believed, must demand from the public power to accord facilities which would allow the people themselves to proceed with this transformation, and this should be the goal which the workers pursue in the public arena. Sorel asserted that experience had demonstrated that in this battle between the workers and the bourgeois state the need for solidarity and unity among the proletariat was essential. The totality of workers, he believed, " . . . forme un corps; les intérêts de tous sont solidaires; nul ne peut abandonner la cause de ses camarades sans être considéré comme un traître."¹⁴

The syndicats, according to Sorel, pursued general results which would benefit all workers; their ends were not egoistic, they did not seek special exclusive privilege. Yet, he advised, their role must not be one of passive resistance because that would only expose them to the " . . . influence prépondérante des démagogues

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18. " . . . it is in the breast of the proletariat, it's a means of its own resources, which must create for itself the new law."

¹⁴ *Ibid.* " . . . form a body; the interests of all are bound together; no one can abandon the cause of his comrades without being considered a traitor."

bourgeois."¹⁵ The socially divisive capitalistic categories of buyer and seller must be eliminated and replaced, Sorel believed, by the new social concept of mutuality for which the proletariat engaged all its energies.

The question of morality remained critical for Sorel who wrote that it would be criminal to undertake a social revolution which " . . . aurait pour résultat de mettre en péril le peu de moralité existant."¹⁶ Sorel added that the economic transformations envisioned by Marx could not be realized " . . . si les travailleurs n'ont pas acquis un degré supérieur de culture morale."¹⁷ Certain followers of Marx, according to Sorel, had ignored the moral question, and their skepticism had been supported, he believed, by Durkheim's conclusion that preconceived methods for moralizing the people had been largely ineffective. For Sorel the question was not

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21. " . . . preponderant interest of bourgeois demagogues."

¹⁶Ibid., p. 27. Sorel credited Durkheim for having produced the thesis which he believed consolidated the concept of historical materialism from a moral point of view. His reference is incomplete: le Suicide, Etude sociologique; See "L'avenir socialiste," p. 27. " . . . would have for a result the putting in peril of the little existing morality."

¹⁷Ibid., p. 28. " . . . if the workers have not acquired a superior degree of moral culture."

" . . . de savoir quelle est la meilleure morale, mais seulement de déterminer s'il existe un mécanisme capable de garantir le développement de la morale."¹⁸ This mechanism, according to Sorel, might be found in the trade union movement, which had in several instances made progress in combating alcoholism--a problem which, he noted: "L'expérience a montré que la législation et la police officielle sont impuissantes pour arrêter. . . ." ¹⁹

A strong and disciplined syndicat, Sorel suggested, would have the advantage of providing a constant reinforcement among the membership which could encourage a particular type of behavior. Women and children also would find more protection and security, Sorel believed, in the context of a workers movement which followed what he called "la première règle": to remain exclusively worker--which for Sorel required the exclusion of the intellectuals whose role was to remain auxiliary. In its battle with the state, Sorel reaffirmed that the syndicats must attempt only to obtain a " . . . législation sociale, favorable à son développement."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid. " . . . to know what is the best morality, but only to determine if there existed a mechanism capable of guaranteeing the development of morality."

¹⁹Ibid., p. 29. "Experience has shown that legislation and the official police are powerless to stop it."

²⁰Ibid., p. 30. " . . . social legislation, favorable to its development."

La Science Et La Morale

During the winter of 1899, Georges Sorel participated in a conference at the Collège libre des Sciences sociales in Paris, which was devoted to the presentation of theories concerning moral problems. On January 9, 1900, Sorel delivered an address to this body which was entitled "La science et la morale" in which he enlarged upon his conception of morality. Opening his address with a reference to the ancient Greeks, Sorel affirmed his belief that moral questions were social in nature and could be best approached by metaphysicians, who were ". . . seuls compétent pour discuter les questions sociales, d'une manière utile."²¹

Western civilization, according to Sorel, retained the postulate of Greek philosophy which assumed an identity in the laws of the mind and which led to attempted reasonings on human industry and institutions. This Sorel called the ". . . influence bienfaisante de la culture classique."²² Recently, Sorel stated, the

²¹G. Belot and M. Bernès, Questions de morale (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillièrre et Cie., Félix Alcan, editeur, 1900), p. 1. This was the published version of the "Leçons professées au Collège libre des Sciences sociales" and will hereinafter be referred to as Questions de morale. ". . . alone were competent to discuss social questions in a useful manner."

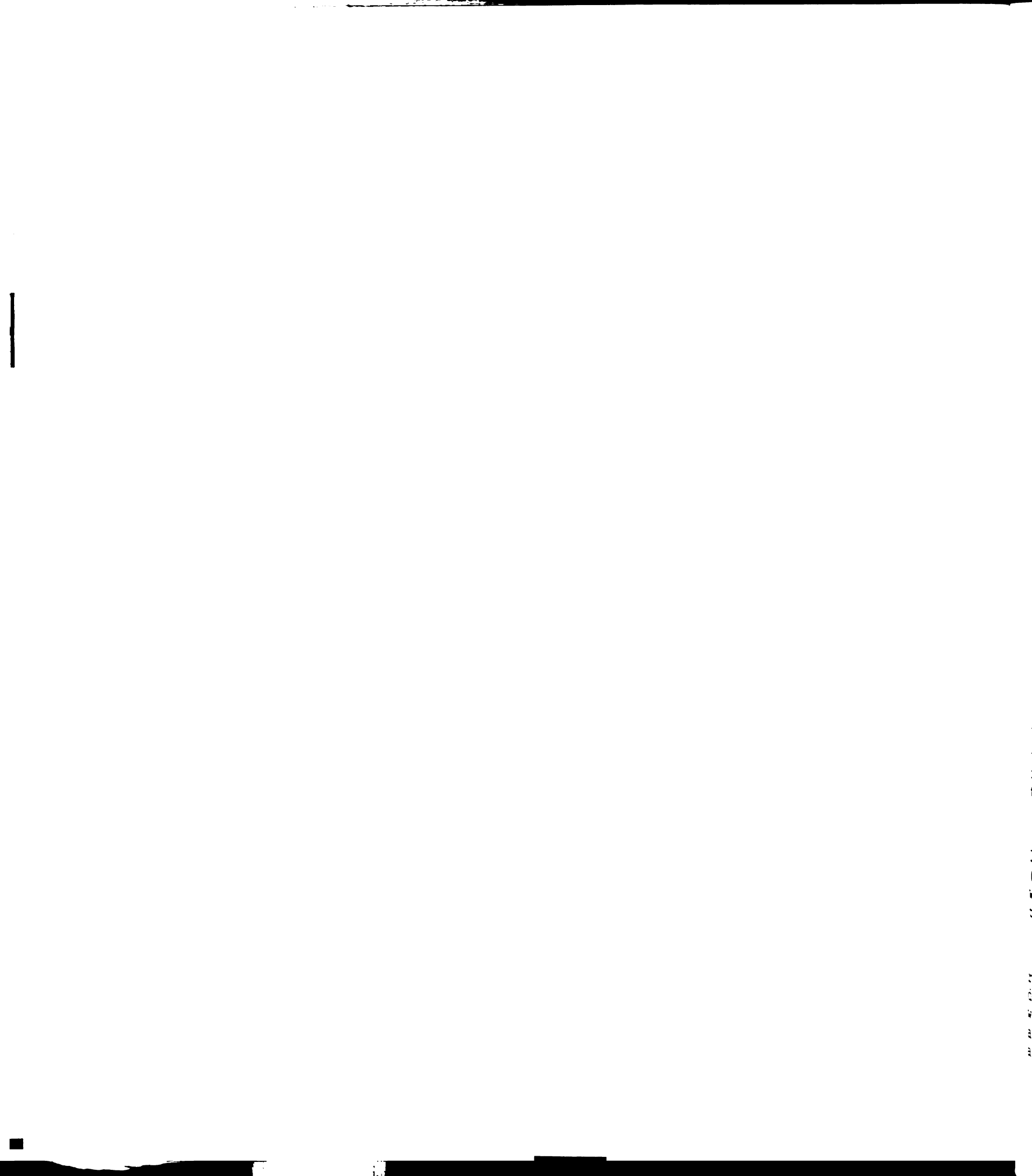
²²Ibid., p. 1. ". . . beneficent influence of classical culture."

goal of science had been imagined as the total alleviation of suffering and human misery, and many doctrines of social reform had been founded on this assumed goal. As a result of this perspective, Sorel believed, the social question had become not a question of justice but a question of happiness. The authors of utopian ideas of the nineteenth century were, according to Sorel, ". . . sous l'influence de préjugés scientifiques,-- de proposer des solutions fondées sur une conception optimiste du monde."²³ But the result of this scientific optimism was, according to Sorel, a profound discouragement.

Georges Sorel asserted that it was a fundamental error to consider pleasure and pain the two poles of human life, especially when the interpretation of the two states was exclusively quantitative. The result of this false conception, Sorel noted, was to employ the images of mathematics in a realm of psychology ". . . sous prétexte de rigueur scientifique, remplacent ce qui est d'une observation facile par ce qui est d'une observation difficile ou même impossible, qui prétendent expliquer ce qui se voit par ce qui ne se voit pas."²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 17. ". . . under the influence of scientific prejudgements,--to propose solutions founded on an optimistic conception of the world."

²⁴Ibid., p. 18. Sorel credited this observation to Wilhelm Wundt without reference to a specific text. ". . . under the pretext of scientific rigor, replacing



The state of pain (douleur) according to Sorel was varied and appeared in all aspects of human life. It was, he affirmed, ". . . la manifestation primordiale de la vie, celle qui nous fournit la preuve irrefutable (pour la conscience) de notre mélange au monde physique, qui nous démontre à la fois, notre existence et l'existence du monde."²⁵ The states of pleasure were so varied that Sorel believed it was useless to attempt giving general descriptions, however he observed: "Dans le plaisir, nous nous séparons du monde; nous le considérons comme un jouet fait pour nous amuser; nous croyons que tout devrait être arrangé pour nous plaire."²⁶

In the realm of moral life, Sorel stated that the sentiments, which united pleasure and pain in what he called "une profonde combinaison," could exercise a

that which is from an easy observation by that which is from a difficult or even impossible observation, which try to explain that which is seen by that which isn't seen."

²⁵Ibid. ". . . the primary manifestation of life, that which furnishes us with irrefutable proof (for the conscience) of our mixture in the physical world, which demonstrates to us both our existence and the existence of the world."

²⁶Ibid., p. 19. Sorel added: "C'est pour cette raison que le plaisir se manifeste surtout en présence des objets d'art créés à notre intention." "In pleasure, we separate ourselves from the world; we consider it as a game made to amuse us; we believe that all should be arranged to please us."

considerable influence on behavior.²⁷ Love, for Sorel, belonged to this category of sentiments because, he believed, it engendered a sacrifice which could be accomplished with joy. "L'amour maternal, he asked, est-il autre chose qu'on long et joyeux martyre?"²⁸ Sorel chided social reformers whom he believed had failed to comprehend how a sentiment as fugitive as love could endure and provide the basis for the family as a social unit. These writers, he charged, had confused "l'amour avec l'érotisme." The mystics, Sorel concluded, ". . . qui ont été si habiles observateurs de la nature humaine, nous apprennent que si l'âme a été vraiment saisie par l'amour, si elle a connu cette combinaison de plaisir et de douleur, il est extrêmement rare qu'elle brise les liens qu'elle a, une fois, acceptés."²⁹ Sorel concluded that pain played an important role in the world and he complained that philosophies exclusively founded on the consideration of enhancing pleasure ended by glorifying passion and sanctifying individual cynicism.

²⁷This idea Sorel related to Theodule Ribot who had used the term "sublime" in Psychologie des sentiments, p. 43, and Karl von Hartmann, Philosophie de l'inconscient, p. 395. These incomplete references are Sorel's. Ibid.

²⁸Ibid. "Maternal love, is it something else than a long joyous martyr?"

²⁹Ibid., p. 20. ". . . who have been such able observers of human nature, teach us that if soul has truly been seiged by love, if it has known this combination of pleasure and pain, it is extremely rare that it will break the ties once accepted."

Les Facteurs Moraux De L'Evolution

Pessimism was therefore for Sorel an extremely important and effective perspective. In an address delivered on January 30, 1900, once again at the Collège libre des Sciences sociales, he reaffirmed this point of view: "Au premier rang des sentiments efficaces, je place ceux qui se rapportent à la conception pessimiste des futurs."³⁰ Sorel speculated that one of the reasons the civilizations of antiquity had not produced a moral reform in the world had been the lack of a sufficiently pessimistic spirit. In the instance of Christianity, Sorel noted, the idea that the world was the natural realm of evil exercised more influence in behalf of Christianity's growth and endurance than did its ideas of sublime charity. The expansion of Socialism, Sorel believed, depended upon the hypothesis that things moved " . . . de mal en pis en vertu de tendances immanentes et que cette déchéance ne peut être arrêtée que par la force organisée des classes ouvrières."³¹ Social theories had, Sorel believed, less influence on the human mind when they were fundamentally optimistic. Reformist socialists

³⁰"Les facteurs moraux de L'évolution" also appeared in Questions de morale, p. 94. (Hereinafter referred to as "Les facteurs moraux de L'évolution.") "In the first row of efficacious sentiments, I place those that relate to the pessimistic conception of futures."

³¹Ibid. " . . . from bad to worse in virtue of immanente tendencies and that this decline can only be stopped by the organized force of working classes."

were forced to take an optimistic position, Sorel noted, because they were obliged to vaunt the benefits of their reforms and this indirectly weakened the worker's movement.

L'Ethique Du Socialisme

With respect to ethics, Sorel observed that Socialism in his day recognized two opposed conceptions. The first, he called the natural rights tradition, which he believed was attached to the liberal bourgeoisie, and associated with the French Revolution. The second was that of historical right, which Sorel said had been developed principally under the influence of Karl Marx " . . . puise ses principes dans l'étude des conditions sociales produits par la grande industrie."³² However, Sorel warned, neither was a pure school. In most cases, he believed, socialists drew upon both positions in elaborating their ethical ideas. The true socialist movement, he interjected, was both a revolt and an organization. Its revolt was directed against hierarchy and property, and its organization was based on mutual aid, common resistance and cooperation. This movement claimed, according to Sorel, " . . . imposer à la société

³²Georges Sorel, "L'éthique du Socialisme," Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale (Paris: Armand Colin et Cie., 1899), p. 281. (Hereinafter referred to as "L'éthique du Socialism.") " . . . taking his principles in the study of social conditions produced by big industry."

de l'avenir les principes qu'il élabore dans son sein pour sa vie sociale propre; il espère faire entrer la raison dans l'ordre social en supprimant la direction de la société par les capitalistes."³³

While admitting the difficulty of accounting for the formation of the concept of historical right, which he believed Karl Marx had opposed to the doctrine of natural rights, Sorel complained that the followers of Marx, in their battles against their adversaries, had often ridiculed all ethical preoccupations, while placing all of their emphasis on the material side of the argument. These Marxists had reached the point, Sorel observed, of considering judicial institutions " . . . comme procédés machiavéliques, employés par les classes dirigeantes en vue d'assurer le maintien de l'ordre à leur profit."³⁴ The result of this approach, Sorel believed, had been to ignore the moral basis of the mission of Marx; only the victory of the proletariat was discussed, he charged, without any preoccupation with the ethical qualities of the conflict. Yet Marx, according to Sorel, had been strongly interested in class conflict

³³Ibid., pp. 280-81. " . . . to impose on future society the principles that it elaborated in its breast for its own social life; it hoped to make reason enter the social order in suppressing the direction of society by the capitalists."

³⁴Ibid., p. 286. " . . . as machiavellian procedures, employed by the directing classes in view of assuring the maintenance of order for their profit."

which resulted in the introduction of new moral concepts, and Sorel pointed to the example of the struggle for the 10-hour workday for women and children in England as an event which Marx had praised in Capital: ". . . le bill des dix heures, ne fut pas seulement un succès pratique, que ce fut le triomphe d'un principe, qu'une nouvelle conception de l'économie avait été introduite dans la société anglaise."³⁵ Sorel concluded that the battle of the classes had an important bearing on judicial systems; it was, he believed, a battle between two principles in which each system was characterized by the political idea that each class had of the role of the law.

The driving force of the entire socialist movement, according to Sorel, was the opposition between law and morality. Change was forthcoming, he predicted, when men reflect upon the disparity between their moral sentiments and the statements of judicial regulations

. . . il arrive toujours des cas où les plaintes de l'individu opprimé nous semblent plus sacrées que les traditions, les nécessités de l'ordre et les principes sur lesquels repose la société; à cet instant le droit historique est ébranlé et considéré comme indigne de l'homme. La morale ne nous fournit aucun moyen pour construire un système juridique nouveau; elle n'apporte que des négations;

³⁵Ibid. ". . . the bill of 10 hours, was not only a practical success, it was the triumph of a principal, a new conception of the economy had been introduced to English society."

suisant nos habitudes d'esprit, notre éducation et nos tendances générales, nous ébauchons de nouvelles formes de droit.³⁶

The historical origins of this "la réclamation obstinée pour la justice individuel," according to Sorel, originated in the people of Israel. He accepted the historical thesis of Renan, whom he believed had truly understood the importance in history of the opposition between law and morality, and he agreed with Renan that Rome and Greece had founded the state, law, philosophy and science, and that " . . . l'origine de cette oeuvre de protestation morale fût vraiment israélite."³⁷ These moral elements, Sorel believed, did not derive from human nature, but were derived from certain historical conditions and in this sense he reiterated his continuing belief that "Nous vivons sur des ressources accumulées

³⁶ Ibid., p. 291.

. . . It always comes in cases where the complaints of oppressed individuals seem to us more sacred than traditions, the necessity of order and the principles on which society rests; at this instant historic law is shaken and considered unworthy of man. Morality furnishes no method for constructing a new juridic system; it only brings negations; following our spiritual habits, our education and general tendencies, we sketch new forms of law.

³⁷ Ibid.. Sorel's reference here is simply Histoire d'Israël, t. III, p. 251, Renan. " . . . the origin of this work of moral protestation was truly israelite."

par nos pères."³⁸ The socialists had often believed that the milieu acted upon man in an automatic manner, Sorel charged, and this explained their failure to consider the conditions necessary for the perfection of moral sentiments: "Il y a une lacune grave dans l'éthique socialiste."³⁹

Sorel asserted that even the most beautiful theory had value only in application, and to this extent he felt that Aristotle had correctly sought to consider morality as part of politics. Thus he believed that it was necessary to act to enlarge the scope of moral ideas received from the past. Socialism, he noted, had undergone an historical development in which it had passed from dreams of a perfect life to the immediate desire to practice a tolerable life; it had passed he said " . . . de l'utopie à la science."⁴⁰ But the movement retained an internal

³⁸Sorel, "L'éthique du Socialisme," p. 292. Sorel asked the additional question: " . . . il faut savoir si nous entretenons suffisamment la moralité dans le monde moderne. Je crois que beaucoup de socialistes regardent aujourd'hui l'avenir avec une certaine méfiance; car presque tous les marxistes regrettent vivement l'exagération avec laquelle on a longtemps vanté les beautés du matérialisme." "We live on the resources accumulated by our fathers."

³⁹Ibid., p. 294. "There is a grave hole in the socialist ethic."

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 296. Sorel referred to Marx who had noted that "a problem is only posed in the epoch when the solution has become possible." No specific work cited by Sorel. " . . . from utopia to science."

aspect which relied for its force on a collection of psychological states which were always inseparable from the external social conditions. He referred to the Christian education as an example of the powerful influence which these internal psychological states exerted: "L'éducation chrétienne a pris pour base bien plus les légendes des hagiographes que les récits des historiens critiques."⁴¹ These legends, he believed, furnished illustrations of Christian virtues elevated to an heroic dimension in order that the desired habits could be clearly presented. Sorel thought it would be possible to conceive socialist intentions in a similar way: by imagining a government where bourgeois traditions no longer existed, where hierarchy and property had disappeared. It was not necessary to have a detailed idea of this final state, according to Sorel, ". . . il suffit de nous en représenter seulement l'allure générale pour que nous puissions apprécier l'identité des états psychologiques correspondant à ce régime avec nos états psychologiques actuels."⁴² The final regime imagined by the socialists, Sorel stated, was not susceptible of being fixed at some

⁴¹Ibid., p. 297. "Christian education has taken for a base more the hagiographical legends than the reports of historical critiques."

⁴²Ibid. ". . . it suffices for us to represent only the general allure in order that we might appreciate the identity of psychological states corresponding to this regime with our present psychological states."

determinate date by a prophetic sociology " . . . il est dans le présent; il n'est pas en dehors de nous; il est dans notre propre coeur."⁴³ The object of Socialism, Sorel insisted, must not be a partial emancipation of the proletariat, it must remain opposed to the maintenance of all traditional claims to special title; it must be a battle for the abolition of all government by class. It was this ethical principle, Sorel believed, which was to direct all socialist thinking and action.⁴⁴

The question of the study of relationships between men and women and their children--the family unit--had also been too often ignored by socialists, according to Georges Sorel. He agreed with Le Play, that the family sentiments exercised an enormous influence on the general demeanor of a society.⁴⁵ In the more advanced industrial

⁴³Ibid., p. 298. " . . . it is in the present; it is not outside of us; it is in our own heart."

⁴⁴Jaurès, often scorned by Sorel, is given a generous treatment at the conclusion of this essay which balances other less flattering earlier references: "Avec les prolétaires socialistes on a vu marcher le grand orateur, qui a montré que dans les classes bourgeoises il y a toujours des hommes capables de comprendre le mouvement socialiste et de le représenter aux heures des crises décisives: la conduite admirable de Jaurès est la plus belle preuve qu'il y a une éthique socialiste." Ibid., p. 301.

⁴⁵In this regard Sorel wrote: "Ce sera l'honneur de le Play d'avoir reconnu l'importance capitale des sentiments familiaux sur l'allure générale des sociétés: suivant le régime établi dans la famille on peut avoir des sociétés misonéistes ou des sociétés inquiètes. . . ." Ibid., p. 292.

countries, Sorel found that the workers were very pre-occupied with the future of their children. They sought, he wrote, " . . . à les faire instruire et veulent leur assurer un sort meilleur que le sort qu'ils ont connu."⁴⁶

Because of this desire for improvement which he believed originated in the family, Sorel attached great importance to the role of women in the development of Socialism.

The sentiment of improvement, he believed, was much more highly developed in women than in men. Returning to an earlier position, Sorel reiterated his belief that the woman was the great educator of the human genre, and not only with respect to children but even more with respect to men. "It is the woman who moralizes us," he wrote.

"Man is transformed through love which disciplines his instincts, and because of this, respect for women is the most essential element in the march towards Socialism."⁴⁷

The sentiment of love, Sorel believed, demonstrated how energetically man could execute actions in the absence of any legal obligations. At the nexus of the moralizing influence of love, Sorel found the need for relationships based on freedom and the absence of external restraints:

" . . . tandis que l'histoire de la jurisprudence est

⁴⁶ Ibid. " . . . to make them instructed and wanted to assure them a better lot than they had known."

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 293.

l'histoire des ruses imaginées pour se soustraire aux règles juridiques, l'histoire de la morale nous montre que la notion de vertu s'identifie avec la soumission absolue aux engagements libres."⁴⁸ Agreeing with Engels, Sorel believed that a new morality would be born when new forms of sexual union came into being, a union based on devotion, reciprocity and respect. Writing in the preface to Le Socialisme, by M. N. Colajanni in 1900, Sorel stated that " . . . the woman demands the right to not be transformed into a reproductive beast."⁴⁹ He further noted:

Les socialistes ont donc raison de considérer l'affranchissement de la femme comme une partie très essentielle de toute réforme profonde de la société. . . . Il ne devrait exister qu'une seule morale pour les deux sexes; mais il ne faudrait pas que les femmes imitassent les mauvais exemples que leur ont donnés jusqu'ici les hommes.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 285. " . . . while the history of jurisprudence is the history of imagined ruses in order to avoid juridic rules, the history of morality shows us that the notion of virtue identifies itself with the absolute submission to free engagements."

⁴⁹M. N. Colajanni, le Socialisme (Paris: V. Girard et E. Brière, 1900), translated from the Italian by M. Tacchella with a preface by Georges Sorel, p. xx.

⁵⁰Ibid. It is in the context of this position that Sorel's statement in behalf of chastity was made: " . . . le monde ne deviendra plus juste que dans la mesure où il deviendra plus chaste."

The socialists are thus right to consider the liberation of women as a very essential part of any profound reform of society. There should only exist one single morality for the two sexes; but it would not be necessary that women imitate the bad examples that men have given them up to now.



Les Polémiques Pour L'Interprétation
Du Marxisme

The crisis of Marxist socialism, represented by the debate between Bernstein and Kautsky, became the subject of an analysis by Georges Sorel which first appeared in the Revue Internationale de Sociologie and was later published in Paris by Giard and Brière in 1900. The debate centered around a book published by Bernstein which produced what Sorel called " . . . un effet analogue à celui d'une prédication protestante éclatant au milieu de populations catholiques."⁵¹ Bernstein had, Sorel reported, invited the socialists to disregard strict formula and observe the world instead with the object to understand it, and thus to play a more effective role therein. Georges Sorel concluded that the Marxian analysis contained what he called "un grand fond de subjectivisme," and this, he believed, accounted for the disagreement between Bernstein and Kautsky in its interpretation. The difference between the two thinkers Sorel found was the direction of their thought. Bernstein looked to the future and wished to revive Marxism by disregarding dogmatic formula; he was a revisionist who,

⁵¹Georges Sorel, Les polémiques pour l'interprétation du Marxisme (Paris: Giard and Brière, 1900), p. 4. (Hereinafter referred to as "Les polémiques" originally published in the Revue Internationale de Sociologie, 1900.) " . . . an analogous effect to that of a protestant sermon bursting in the middle of a catholic population."

Sorel wrote, " . . . se préoccupait surtout des résultats pratiques."⁵² If the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany were itself emancipated from superstition, Sorel speculated, the book of Bernstein would be welcomed as a deliverance. But the more conservative position of Kautsky was, according to Sorel, likely to be successful with the German masses. Kautsky was, he concluded: "Le conservateur des vieux symboles, le défenseur des vieilles abstractions, le maître des vieilles sentences . . . il ne faut pas se dissimuler que le triomphe de M. Kautsky voudrait dire la ruine définitive du marxisme, dépouillé désormais de tout intérêt scientifique."⁵³

Formes Et Essence Du Socialisme

Sorel noted what he considered a great change in Socialism since the time that the movement had given birth to permanent and influential parliamentary parties. The socialists had undergone, according to Sorel, a division of labor which separated the theoretically inclined socialists who now followed what Sorel termed "les progrès de la sociologie" from "les hommes d'action"

⁵²Sorel, "Les polémiques," p. 45. " . . . occupied himself, above all, with practical results."

⁵³Ibid. "The conservator of old symbols, the defender of old abstractions, the master of old maxims . . . it is not necessary to hide that the triumph of M. Kautsky would like to tell the definitive ruin of Marxism, deprived henceforth of all scientific interest."

who, Sorel affirmed, engaged in battles in public life and " . . . surtout, prenant à tâche de développer les institutions (syndicats, coopératives, etc.) par lesquelles le socialisme affirme sa réalité."⁵⁴ The socialists, Sorel charged, were wrong in their attempt to build a doctrinaire party; especially since as he believed it was widely recognized " . . . qu'il faut procéder à un révision rigoureuse de la doctrine laissé par Marx et Engels."⁵⁵

What was essential in Marx, Sorel insisted, was his conception of a "social mechanism formed by classes" whose conflict would utterly transform society.⁵⁶ However, Sorel warned, it was vital to know what scientific value Marx attached to this scheme, and he wrote " . . .

⁵⁴Salverio Merlino, Formes et essence du Socialisme, with a preface by Georges Sorel (Paris: Giard and Brière, 1899), p. I. (Hereinafter referred to as Formes et essence.) This work, which Sorel especially admired, bore the following thematic inscription on the title page: "Il est deux socialismes: l'un métaphysique, l'autre pratique, expérimental et, dans ces limites, positif." " . . . especially, taking to task to develop institutions (syndicals, cooperatives, etc.) by which socialism affirms its reality."

⁵⁵Ibid., p. III. Sorel made reference to the agreement of Benedetto Croce in this regard and cited his work by title only: Per le interpretazione e la critica di alcuni concetti del marxismo, p. 44. " . . . it is necessary to proceed to a rigorous revision of the doctrine left by Marx and Engels."

⁵⁶Merlino, Formes et essence, p. V.

d'ordinaire, les formules abstraites employées par lui ne doivent pas être prises dans un sens trop précis."⁵⁷ One must not forget, Sorel cautioned, that the battle of the classes could not explain all history and this, he believed, was an important hole in the Marxian theory. Sorel turned instead to a more empirical and less abstract analysis: " . . . we see only men grouped in classes, acting under the influence of observable sentiments; we can verify daily the march of phenomena, and determine how conditions are changed and we can correct our ideas of the future as the facts become more numerous."⁵⁸ It was Sorel who wrote, " . . . le mécanisme humain par lequel se produisent les changements dans le monde actuel, d'après les impulsions données par des volontés humaines, dans les conditions historiques données."⁵⁹ The spirit of the method of Marx had been misunderstood, Sorel observed, because so many had believed in the "fatilité" of the solution announced by Marx. This dogmatic

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. VI. Sorel also noted: " . . . plus ses (Marx) expressions sont générales moins il leur accordait d'importance." " . . . ordinarily, the abstract formulas employed by him must not be taken in too precise a sense."

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. VII.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. VIII. " . . . the human mechanism by which the changes in the present world produce themselves, according to the given impulses by human wills, in the given historic conditions."

determinism, Sorel thought, replaced real history by a succession of forms engendered by causes independent of human action. This falsification of the Marxist principle Sorel blamed on Engels who had introduced, according to Sorel, a philosophy of history which he called "dialectical."⁶⁰ This position was never justified by Engels, Sorel charged, and it was almost impossible to comprehend. Sorel remained convinced that " . . . il n'y a rien de déterminé dans l'histoire."⁶¹

Since the appearance of Capital, Sorel believed, the world had changed, and he insisted that " . . . on a reconnu que les phénomènes ne se produisent pas suivant le schéma donné par Marx."⁶² The future was always an unpredictable possibility for Sorel who emphatically stated: " . . . nous ne connaissons pas le mécanisme social qui existera dans un certain nombre d'années et nous ne pouvons déjà que très difficilement raisonner sur le présent."⁶³ Sorel concluded that the man of

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. IX and X.

⁶¹Ibid., p. X. " . . . there is nothing determined in history."

⁶²Ibid. " . . . we have recognized that phenomena doesn't produce itself following the scheme given by Marx."

⁶³Ibid., p. XI. To the contrary, Sorel found indeterminism in Marx, which he believed historical materialism had only served to obstruct: "Il y a une grande indétermination dans le système historique de Marx: le mouvement, dit-il dépend de la culture sociale;

action could only discover indications, not certainties, from sociological studies, and these indications could provide him with the means to freely construct tentative guidelines for action.

The worker's movement, Sorel concluded, must not be content with the pursuit of purely material ends. To seek these ends exclusively would deliver the movement into the hands of the political opportunists whom, Sorel believed, were always ready to lead an army of partisans who could be tempted by the hope of immediate pleasures. These political opportunists who Sorel named "les démogogies," constituted the greatest danger to the worker's movement. Sorel believed the only safeguard against "les démogogies" was the sentiment of justice in the masses of the workers which included the principle that "En s'émancipant, le prolétariat doit émanciper tous ceux qui souffrent."⁶⁴ This posture, Sorel thought, would produce the impression in the minds of even the bourgeois victims of the social order, of the militant proletariat as the only soldier, armed and capable of

mais on ne sait pas comment il en dépend; il n'existe aucun moyen de définir cette dépendance d'une manière générale, si on reste fidèle aux principes du matérialisme historique." ". . . we don't know the social mechanism which will exist in a certain number of years and we can already only with great difficulty reason on the present."

⁶⁴Ibid., p. XVI. "In freeing itself, the proletariat must free all those who suffer."

defending justice and truth: "C'est le prolétariat qui, aujourd'hui, devient le champion de tous les intérêts généraux contre les intérêts particuliers."⁶⁵ The unified workers, Sorel thought, could bring about a moral transformation which would have profound judicial implications. He complained that Marx had ignored this necessary "la préparation juridique," which Sorel held was indispensable for the realization of the socialist regime. Sorel referred to this preparation as the moral unification of society brought about by the proletariat. He wanted the proletariat to engage itself in " . . . tous les débats qui s'ouvrent, afin de développer dans les classes ouvriers des sentiments de justice et de désintéressement; mettre en évidence l'opposition irréductible qui existe entre les nouvelles conceptions sur le droit et la division en classes."⁶⁶ Sorel envisioned the proletariat as the hope of all victims of the current social organization and as a means to make concrete the incorrigible vices of that organization. To this extent the proletariat, he believed, by sustaining general

⁶⁵Ibid., p. XVIII. "It is the proletariat who today, becomes the champion of all general interests against the special interests."

⁶⁶Ibid., p. XIX. ". . . all the debates opened, in order to develop in the working class sentiments of justice and disinterest; put in evidence the irreducible opposition which exists between the new conception on rights and the division of classes."

interests, would become an indispensable advocate of all exploited and mistreated elements, and by exposing the discrepancy between the moral and the legal could thereby initiate a new social organization.

Marx taught, according to Sorel, that the trade unions were the first foundations of the proletarian edifice; they were not destined to endure forever, but they would serve to develop sentiments of mutuality and solidarity which would become the functioning basis of the institutions of the future. Thus Sorel observed that Marx, like himself, appreciated the role of workers unions in the development of new sentiments, and he concluded that in the view of Marx as well as his own, the unions " . . . ont moins pour résultat de faire monter les salaires que d'accroître la solidarité entre les travailleurs."⁶⁷ The emphasis which many socialists placed on the material transformation of life seemed to Sorel a failure of interpretation. He believed that socialism was a moral question in the sense that it would bring to the world a new manner of judging all human acts, " . . . pour employer une célèbre expression de Nietzsche,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. XXV. A way to measure the value of institutions Sorel stated was to apply the following standard: "Tout ce qui tend à diminuer l'esprit de responsabilité, la valeur de la dignité personnelle, l'énergie de l'initiative, doit être condamné; car cela tendrait à diminuer ce qui doit être exalté dans la société future," p. XXVI. " . . . have less for a result to raise salaries than to increase the solidarity between workers."

une nouvelle évaluation de toutes les valeurs."⁶⁸

Because socialism did not accept any of the solutions given by the current civilization, Sorel compared it to Christianity before Constantine. Socialism, he wrote, ". . . se pose devant le monde bourgeois comme un adversaire irréconciliable, le menaçant d'une catastrophe morale, plus encore que d'une catastrophe matérielle."⁶⁹

"It is the transvaluation of all values," Sorel concluded, "to be introduced by the militant prolétariat, which is the highest originality of contemporary socialism."⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., p. XLII. ". . . to employ a celebrated expression of Nietzsche, a new evaluation of all values."

⁶⁹Ibid. ". . . puts itself before the bourgeois world as an irreconcilable adversary, threatening it as a moral catastrophe, more than a material catastrophe."

⁷⁰Ibid., p. XLV.

APPENDIX A

SYNDICALISM, REVISIONISM AND
MORALITY: 1898 - 1900
EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO
BENEDETTO CROCE: 1898 - 1900

7 janvier 1898

"Vous avez apporté une contribution de tout premier ordre à l'étude du marxisme en montrant que les formules d'apparence très générale n'ont, le plus souvent, qu'une valeur très circonstanciée." p. 102

1 avril 1898

"Je n'écris plus au Devenir depuis six mois et je ne crois pas y écrire à l'avenir; je voudrais bien trouver quelque part des revues acceptant mes articles . . . je voudrais continuer ce que j'avais tenté dans le Devenir; c'est-à-dire compléter et améliorer le marxisme suivant les principes de Marx, en suivant plutôt la méthode que la lettre.

. . . les questions sur la morale et la religion ne peuvent plus être traitées avec le dédain des anciens marxistes. . . . L'absence de directions dans la morale et la religion est une des faiblesses du socialisme moderne." p. 107

23 avril 1898

"Je crois qu'il faudrait poser comme principe empirique que l'histoire n'est susceptible d'aucune prévision, parce que les faits n'arrivent point pour rendre rationnels des rapports qui semblent contradictoires aux contemporains. Cette absence de toute prévision me semble être essentielle pour le matérialisme historique, tandis qu'elle serait un scandale pour l'idéaliste." p. 170

9 mai 1898

"Il faut que le socialisme marche dans le voie reconnue bonne par Bernstein ou qu'il devienne une simple scolastique." p. 17

19 octobre 1898

"Pour bien comprendre Marx il faut se placer, comme lui, au point de vue métaphysique . . . j'ai été amené à penser qu'il y a entre Marx et Hégel beaucoup plus de 'rapprochements formels' qu'on ne pense généralement. Beaucoup d'expressions marxistes sont inintelligibles si on ne les rapproche par d'expressions hégéliennes." p. 174

27 decembre 1898

"Au fond, le matérialisme historique ne serait-il pas une des lubies d'Engels? Marx aurait 'indiqué' une voie, Engels a prétendu transformer cette indication en théorie et il l'a fait avec le dogmatisme pédant et parfois burlesque de l'écolier. . . . C'est pour cela qu'il faut revenir à Marx lui-même et laisser de côté tous les faux-savants que la social-démocratie a produits." p. 176

3 juin 1899

"Je crois que pour Marx (au moins à une certaine période de sa vie) le matérialisme historique a été autre chose qu'une indication historiographique . . . La réforme du socialisme aurait pour effet d'empêcher l'exploitation des masses par les charlatans qui tantôt prêchent le communisme, tantôt font du socialisme administratif, qui sont aussi peu consciencieux que les cléricaux dans les moyens d'arriver au pouvoir." p. 300

27 mai 1899

"Je vous ai envoyé hier ma conférence sur l'Ethique du socialisme; j'ai un peu moralisé Marx et Engels, peut-être; je crois qu'ils n'ont jamais beaucoup réfléchi à ces questions, mais je crois avoir développé mes thèses dans un esprit marxiste." p. 304

7 juin 1899

"Il me semble que les Allemands reculent beaucoup: voilà Kautsky qui écrit que Marx a enfermé l'histoire dans la regne de la nécessité. L'article de Kautsky dans la Neue Zeit indique une complète inintelligence de l'histoire." p. 307

30 juin 1899

"Si les marxistes s'adonnaient un peu à ces études ils venaient toute de suite que le matérialisme historique doit être complété par beaucoup d'autres vues sur les relations humaines." p. 309

23 août 1899

"La grande question est le procès de Rennes; je crois que Dreyfus sera encore condamné; le ministère tombera et en avant la réaction." p. 311

9 septembre 1899

"Bernstein vient de m'écrire qu'il a indiqué dans la Neue Zeit qu'il avait été inspiré, en une certaine mesure, par vos travaux. Cela est intéressant parce que les Allemands ne sont pas faits pour indiquer des sources étrangères à leurs idées." p. 311

17 décembre 1899

"J'ai en avec Bernstein une correspondance qui m'a appris beaucoup de choses sur la social-démocratie allemande: c'est l'enfance d'un mouvement ouvrier. Il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses dans son livre." p. 312

18 mars 1900

"Je vois publié dans la Revue de sociologie un article sur Bernstein de Kautsky; ce dernier est décidément un sot." p. 361

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER IV

The relationship between work and aesthetics was announced by Sorel to be of major significance to the modern world in a speech delivered in 1901 which opens Chapter IV. He forecasts that utility will come to dominate modern art and that the Greek concept of work as an expression of slavery and degradation will be replaced by a consideration of the necessary relationship between work and aesthetics.

A book review of Antonin Lavergne's Jean Coste follows Sorel's discussion of aesthetics in Chapter IV and presents his view of the personal necessity of becoming aware of the fatality of human life--unrelieved by what he called "concealing illusions." Human subjectivity and its impact on science, sociology, history and political theory are also discussed in this chapter, as well as speculations on the role and the composition of myth in human thinking.

The chapter concludes with Sorel's examination of the metaphysical preoccupations of modern physics which includes his important epistemological distinction

between the artificial and natural milieux. As in preceding chapters, the letters to Croce which correspond to this period in Sorel's writing career (1901-1905) amplify his characteristic positions.

CHAPTER IV

AESTHETICS, SOCIOLOGY, HISTORY AND

PHYSICS: 1901 - 1905

La Valeur Sociale De L'Art

In 1901, Georges Sorel again participated in a conference at l'École des Hautes Études Sociales in Paris where he discussed his ideas on the social value of art.¹ Sorel stated his belief that the multiplicity of philosophical points of view with respect to aesthetic questions was proof that no single theory could be universally applied to the subject of artistic appreciation. The appreciation of any work of art, he suggested, required the possession of a very clear vision of the milieu in which the artist lived. Sorel regarded this need to be aware of the milieu in which the art was produced as even more important than the details of the artist's personal life. Having rejected the universalist approach to aesthetics, Sorel proceeded to suggest that

¹La Valeur sociale de l'Art; Conference made at l'École des Hautes Etudes Sociales by Georges Sorel and published in Paris by Librairie G. Jacques et Cie, 1901. (Hereinafter referred to as La Valeur.)

" . . . l'oeuvre d'art est, en effet, le résultat de l'explosion de forces latentes, qui se sont lentement accumulées dans l'âme de l'auteur sous l'influence des sentiments généraux de son temps."² Psychology, Sorel believed, was unable to penetrate into the mind of the artist, and it was powerless to provide reasons which would explain the art which was produced. Yet a study of history, he suggested, might be able to explain why a work of art was acclaimed as a masterpiece.³ Although Sorel concluded that no historical law could be discovered which could categorically explain the artist, whose genius he noted " . . . est trop personnel pour tomber sous un loi . . . "⁴, he nonetheless believed that there was an important relationship between the judicial-economic life of a people and the art produced among them and acclaimed as a masterwork.

²Ibid., p. 5. " . . . the work of art is, in effect, the result of the explosion of latent forces, which have slowly accumulated in the soul of the author under the influence of general sentiments of his time."

³Sorel noted that Renan in his Philosophie de l'art had attempted to provide a guide for historians in this research by developing a collection of fixed rules to be followed: " . . . un ensemble de règles fixant l'ordre des caractères à observer." Ibid., p. 6. Sorel doubted that such universal rules would have value to the same extent in all epochs: "Qu'il soit possible de donner des définitions utilisables de ce genre, cela est déjà fort douteux. . . ." Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 7. " . . . is too personal to fall under a law."

The history of art, Sorel believed, showed itself to be closely related to manifestations of force and he underlined the great role which military triumphs, heroic legends and the "fantaises des princes" had played in all art.⁵ There were also, Sorel noted, profound differences between ancient and modern art. The most striking aspect of ancient art, he found to be the predominant role of groups who converged to form complex as well as useful works of art, ". . . ainsi étaient l'architecture du temple, des tombeaux et des citadelles;-- les rites religieux,--la pédagogie."⁶ In the Greek republics, Sorel believed, these complex arts generally served collective ends. But the art which served to ornate the palaces of Persian or Assyrian kings he insisted, ". . . n'avait rien de social."⁷ These were as particularist, he added, as those which decorated the palaces of the Renaissance princes. When the artist later closed himself in his own workshop and sought to perfect his own particular technique, the history of art began what Sorel called its "la deuxième moment." The academic

⁵Ibid. Sorel mentioned that Hippolyte Taine had, more than anyone else, insisted on the enormous influence of Italian anarchy on the Renaissance.

⁶Ibid., p. 14. ". . . thus were the architecture of temples, tombs and citadels;--religious rites, education."

⁷Ibid. ". . . had nothing social."

schools, founded at the end of the Renaissance, insured this separation and isolation of the artists. This was for him " . . . une rupture de ces ensembles . . . on peut dire que l'art devint abstrait."⁸

The forming of academic schools led to the development of new techniques, then to new schools, and although each school wished to be free of former dogmatics, Sorel charged, they too, little by little developed their own scholastic pureilities: "Échapper à toute règle fut le mot d'ordre de beaucoup d'écoles, qui aboutissaient cependant à de nouvelles scholastiques . . . "⁹ Thus we have come, concluded Sorel, to no longer believe in the existence of a general law which could serve to regulate art and we are disposed to accept all art that demonstrates an ingenious talent for invention or combination in the artist. Sorel concluded that 100 years before his time, when the academic art reigned supreme in France, the painters and sculptors, bound by the formula of the schools, worked without taking account of the monuments which would enclose

⁸Ibid. " . . . a rupture of these groups . . . one could say art became abstract."

⁹Ibid., p. 15. Sorel added: " . . . l'esprit s'émancipait au fur et à mesure que le nombre des voies ouvertes devant notre action devenait plus grand." "To escape from all rules was the word of order of many schools, which led however to new scholastics."

their works, not because they lacked good taste but because they lacked the freedom which Sorel believed the contemporary artists enjoyed.

It is said, Sorel continued, that art completely emancipated is merely a means of flattering the tastes of the general public, and with the disappearance of the old rules, art had become dependent on the instincts of amateurs: " . . . condamné à plaire a tout prix, il a perdu toute son indépendance, sa dignité et sa vraie liberté."¹⁰ Some philosophers had insisted on this point and sustained that art lost all raison d'être when it thus subordinated itself to pleasure. These objections were, according to Sorel, in large part founded.

Free or individualistic art had been criticized for being too preoccupied with effect, according to Sorel.¹¹ It had been reproached for seeking the bizarre, the extraordinary and sometimes the extravagant; for wanting to astonish the mind rather than to seduce the sentiments by grace and force. We want, Sorel believed, for the creator to show us something personal, something that does not occur in the course of vulgar life.

¹⁰Ibid. " . . . condemned to please at any price, it lost all its independence, its dignity and its true liberty."

¹¹Sorel's reference for this criticism was to Tolstoi in a work cited as Qu'est-ce que l'art? pp. 138-67, 178-93, 210-34. The incomplete reference appears in La Valeur in a footnote, p. 16.

Speculating further, Sorel suggested that perhaps art enclosed within itself what he called " . . . un germe profond d'immorality" and he complained that " . . . la psychologie contemporaine n'a guère étudié cette question; cependant on s'est demandé, dans ces derniers temps, s'il n'existe pas un certaine affinité entre la production artistique et l'instinct sexuel. . . ." ¹²

Sorel further observed that with persons having the artistic temperament, the sense of beauty was generally tied very subtly to what he called "surexcitation voluptueuse." Referring to a work by M. Brunetière entitled Discours de combat, Sorel underlined his agreement with the observation that the most beautiful Greek statues did not possess that chastity which many theoreticians had attributed to them and he added that " . . . si leur nudité ne nous choque point, c'est que nous les considérons comme des pièces d'une collection scientifique et surtout c'est que nous ne comprenons pas bien ce

¹²Sorel had found in Proudhon the suggestion that art had been in almost all its periods, an agent for corruption. His reference for this thought is incomplete: Proudhon, Du principe de l'art, p. 255. (Ibid., p. 17, footnote) In his reference to the sexual rôle in artistic production he mentions Ribot, Essai sur l'imagination créatrice, pp. 62-65 and refers additionally to " . . . la théorie du métaphysicien Froschammer," in La Valeur, p. 17. " . . . a profound seed of immorality" . . . "contemporary psychology has scarcely studied this question; however they asked themselves, in its last time, if there did not exist a certain affinity between artistic production and sexual instinct."

qu'elles représentent."¹³ "We wonder," Sorel continued, "if this beauty, created by the Greek artists during the golden age did not, as Proudhon observed in his book entitled Du principe de l'art, end by inspiring impure ideas."¹⁴

Many writers on the subject of art had, according to Sorel, drawn the same conclusion as had Tolstoi, namely that art in the social context had many parasitic characteristics. An evolution had caused a change in the relationship between the artist and his work. In aristocratic times it was essential, he continued, for the artist to be aware of the sentiments which his work produced in those who paid for it. But today we no longer understand, he stated, a society organized for the pleasure of the privileged classes and thus, Sorel believed, it was necessary to consider how art might become adapted to the essential conditions of modern life. Must not art tend to universalize itself, he asked? It was incontestable to Sorel that: " . . . le public se considère, de moins en moins, comme une réunion d'amateurs passifs; il commence à intervenir d'une manière active

¹³Ibid., p. 18. The Brunetièrè reference was simply Discours de combat, p. 68. " . . . if their nudity does not shock us, it is that we consider them like pieces of a scientific collection and especially that we do not understand well what it represents."

¹⁴Ibid., and Proudhon, Du principe de l'art, p. 327.

dans l'art; et je crois que ce fait est de nature à nous éclairer beaucoup sur l'évolution de plusieurs des arts contemporains."¹⁵

One of the most remarkable phenomena of contemporary artistic history was, Sorel believed, the great importance which was being attributed to music. This growth in the realm of music, Sorel attributed to the great variety of the means of execution which music offered to a public which wanted to regard itself as " . . . plus qu'un simple amateur."¹⁶ Likewise, Sorel found that the modern theater contained extremely varied forms. We are mixed in the action of the modern theater, Sorel observed, " . . . nous sommes comme le chœur antique, . . . officiellement, nous ne sommes pas des exécutants, mais, en fait, nous discutons et nous agissons en nous-mêmes au fur et à mesure que le drame se développe."¹⁷

¹⁵Sorel, La Valeur, p. 20. " . . . the public considers itself less and less as a reunion of passive amateurs; it begins to intervene in an active manner in art; and I believe this fact by nature makes very clear to us the evolution of several contemporary arts."

¹⁶Ibid., p. 21. " . . . more than a simple amateur."

¹⁷Ibid. Sorel qualified this observation: "c'est-à-dire que cela n'est vrai que pour certaines espèces de drame, pour celles qui ne sont pas un simple jeu divertissant." " . . . we are like the ancient chorus, . . . officially, we are not the executors, but in fact, we discuss and we act in proportion as the drama develops."

Georges Sorel believed that his contemporary world was under the influence of a universalizing force which had not been present to the same extent in any previous historical epoch. He called this force "le travail," and believed that modern man was bound to an incessant labor and was " . . . uniquement préoccupée d'agrandir incessamment le champ de la puissance humaine."¹⁸ Because of this fact of modern life, Sorel believed modern art would become totally different from that art which had for its object the pleasure of a society whose art patrons were those who lived in luxury. The present world witnessed the increasing universalization of work which itself, Sorel believed, was ceaselessly becoming more intense and more absorbing. Because the modern world was constantly seeking to avoid the loss of time, Sorel added, it had become important to employ human effort in as complete a manner as possible. Such a system would be intolerable and would end in intellectual exhaustion or in enervation, Sorel affirmed, if it were not accompanied by distractions (délassements) which would interrupt what he called "le travail de l'esprit" and allow a period during which purely psychological forces could become dominant. It had been observed, Sorel noted, " . . . que les hommes d'affaires éprouvent le besoin de

¹⁸Ibid., p. 22. " . . . uniquely preoccupied to agrandize incessantly the field of human power."

rompre brusquement avec leurs habitudes de travail excessif en assistant à des spectacles d'une bouffonnerie enfantine."¹⁹ Sorel added that he thought the greatest cause of the malaise produced by intellectual labor resulted from the impossibility of stopping by a simple exercise of the will. He charged that insufficient account of these needs had been considered by those who produced works for the popular theater and who based their dramatic presentations on esoteric philosophy: ". . . il faut nous donner les spectacles qui amusent les peuples enfants."²⁰

Sorel believed it was possible to explain by this need for distraction (délassement), the great admiration which he thought the contemporary world would increasingly feel before the spectacles of nature. The taste for nature, even in its brute forms, had not, Sorel felt, been sufficiently explained by contemporary psychologists, although it represented a relatively new

¹⁹Ibid., p. 23. Sorel added a note on the psychology of laughter: ". . . les psychologues ont remarqué que le rire est, dans beaucoup de cas, un fait presque complètement physique et on comprend, dès lors, facilement, comme cette explosion de la nature matérielle peut faire disparaître une fatigue intellectuelle qui résulte de l'impossibilité où nous sommes de nous arrêter dans le cours de nos réflexions." ". . . that businessmen felt the need to break brusquely with their excessive work habits in assisting with spectacles of infantile buffoonery."

²⁰Ibid., p. 24. ". . . we must give spectacles which amuse child-people."

phenomena. He thought that such natural wonders as the "untamed beauty of mountains" had only been appreciated since the time of Rousseau, and he believed it was possible to render an account of what he called " . . . cette extension de la sympathie."²¹ He thought the explanation was based on the fact that these spectacles were especially interesting to highly intellectual people who by plunging themselves into worlds heretofore unknown to their minds, felt a sedating and thus beneficial effect. Thus Sorel concluded the old art of luxury had become a new art of distraction which seemed to be absolutely necessary for the intellectual health " . . . des travailleurs de plus et plus absorbé."²²

Modern art was equally unique, Sorel believed, because of the extent to which the idea of beauty was associated with utility. He attributed this confluence with what were, according to his view, new economic realities. The ancient dualism of mind and body, of head and hand, on which Sorel believed " . . . reposait l'économie ancienne" had tended to vanish. Action, which in the economic realm took the form of manual labor, Sorel wrote, " . . . est reconnu pour ce qu'il

²¹Ibid. " . . . this extension of sympathy."

²²Ibid. " . . . more and more absorbed workers."

est réellement, dans l'histoire, le commencement et la fin de toute notre vie. . . . "23 All which remained in the domain of pure speculation and which did not translate itself into any practical result Sorel viewed as a " . . . sorte d'amputation intellectuelle de l'homme."24 If our everyday works, Sorel speculated, were marked by an inventive intelligence, could we not consider these productions as aesthetic? Sorel objected to the notion that only exceptional productions made in "les ateliers académique" and destined to decorate palaces or museums could be considered as art. Many people defined the productions of such institutions as des Beaux-Arts as beauty, Sorel charged, precisely because of their inutility and he concluded: "Ce snobisme a été érigé en théorie et on a soutenu que l'art est par nature une inutilité."25 Notwithstanding these schools, Sorel believed that the contemporary world would come to comprehend the aesthetic value of the practical and useful productions of humanity, and

²³Ibid. " . . . is recognized for what it really is, in history, the beginning and end of our life."

²⁴Ibid., p. 25. This idea Sorel credited to Proudhon and cited simply Proudhon, Justice, t. II, p. 314. " . . . a sort of intellectual amputation of man."

²⁵Sorel, La Valeur, p. 27. "This snobism had been erected in theory and they supported that art is by nature unuseful."

he observed: " . . . le travail est mieux fait quand tout ce qui entoure l'ouvrier est traité avec art."²⁶

Sorel concluded that if things occurred as he had anticipated, and if art became more and more mixed in the life of a society dominated by work, the artist would be forced to concern himself primarily with the use which would be made of his work; the art must, he wrote, " . . . d'abord aboutir à un bon résultat pratique s'il veut qu'on s'intéresse à son travail."²⁷ To this extent Sorel concluded that the nature of modern art would become " . . . la révélation de l'esprit dans le travail."²⁸ "The artist," Sorel wrote, "is truly an artist only in so far as he becomes aware of the energy of his spiritual independence."²⁹

²⁶Ibid. " . . . work is better made when all that surrounds the worker is treated with art."

²⁷Ibid., p. 29. " . . . first to reach a good practical result if it wishes that we have interest in his work."

²⁸Ibid. " . . . the revelation of the spirit in work."

²⁹Ibid. Sorel added that: " . . . si tous les hommes deviennent travailleurs et travaillent avec art, on peut espérer que l'éducation esthétique qui leur sera donnée, aura pour effet de développer l'individualisme dans le monde." Noting that artists had formerly been " . . . personnels d'une manière exagérée et égoïste," Sorel wrote: " . . . c'est la caricature d'un sentiment qui peut être excellent et qui nous manque que trop."

Sorel believed that his contemporary France was entirely dominated by what he called ideas of servitude, and he charged that it was precisely those people who lacked the heart to become free (qui n'ont pas assez de coeur pour être libres) who taught that the love of liberty was a vice. But when the worker and the artist became united, Sorel forecast, the workers would " . . . cesse alors de considérer la loi du travail comme une loi d'esclavage et de dégradation."³⁰ Art, Sorel believed, thus offered a means of ennobling that which ancient civilizations regarded as servile. At the same time, Sorel noted, work executed with an artistic sentiment " . . . est non seulement plus parfait, mais encore plus abondant en quantité."³¹ Sorel concluded his analysis of the social value of art by stating his conviction that "L'éducation artistique, au lieu d'être destinée à faire la joie des oisifs, devient, pour nous, la base de la production industrielle; c'est à elle que nous nous adresserons pour faire aimer le travail, pour faire comprendre à l'homme la grandeur de sa destinée et pour

³⁰Ibid., p. 31. " . . . then stop to consider the work law a law of slavery and degradation."

³¹Ibid. Sorel concluded that it was necessary that a worker finds " . . . que son travail lui apparaisse comme revêtu d'un charme esthétique," p. 32. " . . . is not only more perfect but also more abundant in quantity."

assurer le progrès matériel, sans lequel il n'y aurait, sans doute aucun progrès moral solide réalisable aujourd'hui."³²

Jean Coste

Georges Sorel's aesthetic observations also extended into the realm of literature, and in September, 1901, he composed a literary critique of a novel by Antonin Lavergne entitled Jean Coste.³³ Referring to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions, Sorel praised those writers whom he believed were capable of reproducing in their works " . . . beaucoup de contacts pénètrent jusqu'au fond dernier de notre personne et se combinent avec notre coeur."³⁴ Such a writer Sorel considered Antonin Lavergne and he derided the critics whom he

³²Ibid. "Artistic education, instead of being designed to give joy to the idle, becomes for us the base of industrial production; we will address it to make us like work, to make man understand the greatness of his destiny and to assure material progress without which there will not be, no doubt, any solid, realisable, moral progress today."

³³This critique appeared in the September, 1901, issue of Le mouvement socialiste, Société nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, Paris, pp. 295-99. (Hereinafter referred to by the name of Sorel's article: Jean Coste.)

³⁴Sorel, Jean Coste, p. 293. He observed that "the ordinary novel was full of observations which left on the reader only mechanical impressions and this was why the work of Zola was generally so lifeless."
" . . . many contacts penetrating to the depths of our person and combining with our heart."

called "des éditeurs habitués" for having failed to recognize the merit of Jean Coste. Sorel suggested that this unfavorable reception was attributable to the fact that there were very few literary critics who were capable of interesting themselves in a work which confessed the misery of the human condition. Sorel admired what he called the truth and sincerity which he found in the character of Jean Coste whom he noted did not participate in any "tirades cornéliennes"; Jean Coste, he noted, was " . . . trop pauvre et trop malheureux pour pouvoir être un stoïcien et un révolté, ce luxe est permis seulement aux riches."³⁵ When one lives in a rich hotel, Sorel charged in reference to the critics, when one writes in an office heavy with works of art, the perspective of Jean Coste might seem weak; but for himself, Sorel affirmed: " . . . moi je trouve qu'il est homme."³⁶

What Jean Coste had realized, Sorel believed, was a truth which had escaped the critics, who he charged were corrupted by their mundane lives. Jean Coste recognized that " . . . civilisation organise tout un système

³⁵Ibid., p. 296. Sorel observed the plight of the poor and the silent in a poignant reference: " . . . tous les jours ne voyons-nous pas avec quelle simplicité les petites gens quittent la vie sans songer à rien briser dans ce monde qui a été si mauvais!" " . . . too poor and too unhappy to be able to be a stoic and a rebel, that luxury is only permitted the wealthy."

³⁶Ibid. " . . . I find that he is man."

de ruses pour nous empêcher de regarder en nous-même."³⁷

It was the experience of poverty, Sorel asserted, which caused this superficial structure to fall to pieces. The first contact with what he called "la misère," Sorel insisted, would open to us the mysteries hidden in the soul. Rousseau was capable of discovering "la nature," Sorel affirmed, precisely because his genius had been awakened by a life always bordering on "la misère." How many men of talent, Sorel asked, have extinguished themselves, when they have participated in the conventional lives of "la société bourgeoise?"³⁸

Sorel's critique became an examination of the internal existence of man. The internal strength of each man, he noted, measured itself in those moments of crisis when alone one confronts all which is horrible and inexorable in human existence. At this moment the weak seek to hide from the vision of pain: ". . . il ferme les yeux ou s'étourdit de paroles vengeresses."³⁹ The

³⁷ Ibid. ". . . civilization organizes an entire system of ruses to prevent us from looking at ourselves."

³⁸ Ibid., p. 297.

³⁹ Ibid. The passage in the original: "La force intérieur de l'homme se mesure dans les crises où il se trouve seul en présence de lui-même, au moment où il connaît tout ce qu'a d'horrible et d'inexorable l'existence. Un faible cherche à se cacher la vue du calice. . . ." ". . . he closes his eyes or deafens himself to vengeful words."

strong descended to the foundations of themselves and asked themselves: "Quel est mon droit?" For Jean Coste the question was even more basic because he had asked: "Have I the right to kill myself?"⁴⁰ It required a courage beyond that of the "héros cornéliens," Sorel affirmed, to submit without any concealing illusion to the fatality of life. This was "l'affreuse pensée" which Antonin Lavergne had revealed with what Sorel called "sincère et véridique"; Sorel concluded " . . . le hasard est grand maître en ce monde."⁴¹

In a final paragraph Sorel referred to another teaching which Jean Coste had furnished, which he claimed to be equally important. The character of Jean Coste, Sorel observed, showed the unhappiness of a man who had " . . . n'a pas rencontré la femme forte qui aurait dû lui révéler sa destinée et lui donner du coeur dans les jours de défaillance."⁴² It was the love of such a companion, Sorel asserted, that was engendered in the soul of those who triumph over all obstacles.

⁴⁰Ibid. Sorel noted that this terrible question " . . . a fait trembler d'effroi plus d'un malheureux résolu à se délivrer d'un fardeau trop lourd."

⁴¹Ibid. " . . . chance is the great master in this world."

⁴²Ibid. " . . . had not met the strong woman who should have revealed to him his destiny and given to him heart in days of defiance."

Introduction a L'Economie Moderne

The subjective, personal aspect of human social life became by 1903 an idea which dominated Georges Sorel's sociological considerations. Writing in a work entitled Introduction à l'économie moderne, Sorel observed that many sociologists retained a total faith in the sovereign power of science and " . . . s'imaginent la possibilité de déduire de propositions scientifiques des programmes pratiqués."⁴³ According to Sorel, this position was entirely incorrect. It was necessary, he believed, that sociology adopt at the outset of its projects, what he called a frankly subjective aspect, that it understand " . . . ce qu'elle veut faire et qu'elle subordonne ainsi toutes ses recherches au genre de solution qu'elle veut préconiser."⁴⁴ All classifications, and all relationships which were established among phenomena, Sorel believed, depended upon the pursuit

⁴³ Georges Sorel, Introduction à l'économie moderne (2nd ed.; Paris: Marcel Riviere, 1922), p. 386. First edition published in 1903; all quotes are taken from those parts of the second edition which remained unchanged following a revision by Sorel in 1919, and will be hereinafter referred to as: Introduction à l'économie moderne.) " . . . imagines the possibility of deducting scientific propositions from practiced programs."

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 386. It was Sorel's opinion that the great advantage to Socialism in the field of social theory was that it " . . . aborde toutes les questions dans un esprit bien déterminé et qu'il sait où il veut aboutir." " . . . what it wants to do and that it thus subordinates all research in the genre of solution that it wants advocate."

of a practical goal, and to this extent he advised that it would be very prudent to always place this goal in evidence. Sorel considered this approach as an important rule (règle) which he believed was fundamental for the study of social phenomena. Faced with what he saw as the innumerable economic and social systems which followed " . . . le fantôme d'une science qui s'éloigne d'eux toujours et qui toujours les trompe . . . ," Sorel speculated that what was occurring among his contemporaries was " . . . une véritable aliénation mentale."⁴⁵

The ancient Greeks, Sorel continued, adopted the conceptual approach of geometry to study what were essentially unchanging entities (les choses immuables), but this approach to knowledge was, he thought, especially inappropriate for the study of sociological facts. Henri Bergson, whom Sorel believed to be one of the masters of contemporary philosophy, had, according to Sorel, speculated on the value of abandoning the old Greek method in order to " . . . atteindre la réalité, le mobile et le continu."⁴⁶ The means for approaching an understanding

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 385. Sorel rejected the explanation that social science was still young as "de mauvaise excuse" saying that reasoning on human society was "hundreds of years old." " . . . a true mental alienation."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 387. "The criticisms launched by Bergson, Sorel noted, " . . . trouvent surtout leur application dans la sociologie." " . . . attain reality, driving power, and continuity."

of social phenomena required, Sorel suggested, the use of a new system of images which he called "projections stylisées."⁴⁷ This system of images would require, Sorel continued, an artful arrangement sufficient to create the impression of an auxiliary reality (des réalités auxiliaires) possessing its own principle of life and development. However, Sorel warned: ". . . aucun ensemble d'images n'a une valeur absolue; une juxtaposition des 'projections stylisées' qui a rendu les plus grands services pour l'examen de certains problèmes, peut se trouver inefficace pour d'autres questions; il y a beaucoup de subjectivisme dans le sociologie."⁴⁸

One of the least debatable merits of Karl Marx was, according to Sorel, that he had shown an extraordinary dexterity in the organization of these "projections stylisées" to such an extent that he often appeared to have exhausted all the variety of human activity, through such categories of analysis as class

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 388.

⁴⁸ Ibid. "If this approach has remained so often sterile," Sorel wrote, "it is because it has been cultivated by those who are deprived of a creative imagination." ". . . no group of images has an absolute value; a juxtaposition of stylized projections which has rendered the greatest services for the examination of certain problems can find itself inefficacious for other questions; there is much subjectivism in sociology."

conflict. The many errors of others who studied social questions from a philosophical point of view, Sorel charged, occurred in large part because they did not recognize " . . . que leur philosophie ait quelque chose à apprendre de l'art."⁴⁹ A more profound study of the laws of the mind would teach them, Sorel believed, "that philosophy and art are two very related activities."⁵⁰ Ideological constructions were necessary, Sorel continued, but they were also the most frequent cause of error. Therefore, he recommended the rejection of all systems of analysis which were not the product of reflection on institutions, usages and empirical rules, which acquired through practice their final form. This meant, Sorel noted, that reflection on the forms of social life and analysis followed a direction completely opposed to the real movement: " . . . c'est ce qui se présente le dernier dans le monde, qui explique l'antérieur."⁵¹ Thus Sorel

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 389. " . . . that their philosophy had something to learn from art."

⁵⁰Ibid. Painters and sculptors know, Sorel added, that stylization permits a transformation such that the tension of immobility gives a clear idea of mobility: " . . . cet artifice est si ancien qu'il est surprenant que les sociologues ne se soient pas avisés de s'en inspirer pour venir à bout du réel."

⁵¹Ibid., p. 391. Sorel referenced this idea to Karl Marx, Capital, tome I, p. 30. (This incomplete reference is to a French translation, though the edition and translator are unmentioned.) Sorel also credited Vico, who he recalled had stated that " . . . une

concluded, the moralists who attempted to see into the future, and to construct it by thought could end only in reveries. The fundamental character of the future society, Sorel suggested, would only be clearly conceived and usefully introduced into what he called "judicial logic" the day when that society will have disappeared and given place to a new organization.

Georges Sorel terminated his concluding chapter of Introduction à l'Economie moderne, which was entitled "General Observations," with a question which he thought was relevant to the subject of Socialist propaganda.

"I wonder," he asked, "if it is possible to furnish an intelligible exposition of the passage from principles to action without employing myths?"⁵² It did not seem, he claimed, that the historians of philosophy had yet succeeded in producing a very clear idea of the considerable role: " . . . que les mythes ont joué dans la pensée humaine."⁵³ The theory of the Platonic myths, Sorel noted, had not yet been completed and thus he felt

sagesse vulgaire qui sent les choses et les exprime poétiquement, avant que la pensée réfléchie arrive à les comprendre théoriquement," p. 390. " . . . it is that which presents itself last in the world that explains the anterior."

⁵²Ibid., p. 394.

⁵³Ibid. " . . . that myths have played in human thought."

reluctant to enter into what he called " . . . une discussion si ardu." Sorel purposed to limit himself " . . . à émettre quelques appréciations sur les difficultés que rencontre le socialisme contemporain et qui pourraient peut-être se résoudre par une théorie des mythes sociaux."⁵⁴

In contemporary Socialism, Sorel observed, there were many theses which the savants had become reluctant to defend but which the propagandists considered as essential. These discussions without end, Sorel believed, had become fruitless debates but the experience had been instructive. He drew the conclusion that these "famous dogmas" contained something essential to the life and progress of Socialism.⁵⁵ And Sorel stated his belief that it would be impossible to abandon completely what he called "la conception catastrophique." It might be necessary, Sorel speculated, to treat as myths the theories which the savants no longer admit and which the militants regard as vital and beyond controversy.⁵⁶ Marx,

⁵⁴Ibid. " . . . to emit some appreciations on the difficulties that contemporary socialism met and that would perhaps be able to resolve itself by a theory of social myths."

⁵⁵These dogmas included, Sorel noted: the iron law of wages and the resulting increase in human misery; the law of capitalistic concentration; the law of the connection between economic and political power. Ibid., pp. 394-95.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 396.

Sorel observed, " . . . n'avait présenté la conception catastrophique que comme un mythe, illustrant d'une manière très claire la lutte de classe et la révolution sociale."⁵⁷ Sorel concluded that myths were necessary to expose in an exact manner the conclusions of a social philosophy which did not claim to operate according to the rules of scientific logic, but rather was motivated by the realization that the "contested theories" were necessary for modern revolutionary action. On the other hand, Sorel charged, " . . . les constructions savantes, juridiques et pratiques, prônées à l'heure actuelle par des sociologues plus ou moins socialistes, ne sont que tromperies et fausse science."⁵⁸ Sorel concluded that the old revolutionary Socialism was infinitely more penetrated with the philosophic spirit than was the "hyper-judicial" Socialism of the professors and advocates of lofty political reformism.

Le Systeme Historique De Renan

In 1905 Georges Sorel published the results of his study of the historical work to which Ernest Renan

⁵⁷Ibid. " . . . only presented the catastrophic conception as a myth, illustrating in a very clear manner the class struggle and the social revolution."

⁵⁸Ibid. " . . . the savant's constructions, judicial and practical, extolled at the present hour by sociologists more or less socialist, are only fraud and false science."

had devoted thirty years of his life--the history of the origins of the Jews and the Christians.⁵⁹ According to Sorel's opening analysis, there were several possible approaches to the study of the past. Most often, he believed, historians were occupied with the birth of the future, which caused them to seek in the past the early beginnings of this future, explaining its genesis by an exact knowledge of the men who at that time were dominant in the world. This first system, Sorel observed, placed itself ". . . au point de vue d'une génération due à des hommes déterminés."⁶⁰ Another historical methodology considered the past as a congealed mass (une masse figée) whose general demeanor was susceptible of a schematic sketch in which one would seek relations which existed among the dominant principles of institutions as well as the sentiments of classes during a particular period. Differing from the first system which focused on the activities of determined men, the second system, Sorel wrote: ". . . regarde les hommes plutôt comme des porteurs de symboles que comme des créateurs."⁶¹ The first

⁵⁹ Georges Sorel, Le système historique de Renan, ed. by G. Jacques (Paris, 1905). (Hereinafter referred to as Le système historique de Renan.)

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 5. ". . . at the point of view of a generation owed to determined men."

⁶¹ Ibid. ". . . regards men rather as carriers of symbols than as creators."

system claimed that thanks to psychology it could penetrate to the roots of living reality and thereby "l'expliquer tout entier," whereas the second claimed only to provide a clarification of the past " . . . de jeter de la lumière sur certains aspects des choses."⁶² The first system Sorel designated by the term "psychological"; the second he named "scientific."

The psychological system of historiography, Sorel claimed, purposed to explain facts by their antecedents which was held to be the same procedure followed in the science of physics. There was, however, Sorel warned, a great difference between the two procedures: " . . . en physique on arrive à découvrir des lois qui gouvernent l'apparition des phénomènes, tandis qu'en histoire aucune loi de ce genre ne peut être soupçonnée."⁶³ Furthermore, it was necessary to note, according to Sorel, that it would be impossible to know all the psychology of a nation in any determined epoch: "Cette totalité qui comprend tout l'ensemble des motifs et des caractères des acteurs du drame, cette réalité profonde dont la psychologie parle avec tant d'emphase parce qu'elle

⁶²Ibid., p. 6. " . . . to throw some light on certain aspects of things."

⁶³Ibid. " . . . in physics we happen to discover laws which govern the appearance of phenomena, while in history any law of this genre can be suspected."

l'ignore, c'est la mystérieuse 'chose en soi'--que les physiciens renoncent à poursuivre dans la nature."⁶⁴

The sources of history available in archives, Sorel observed, rarely teach us what we need to know in order to comprehend the acts of important persons. The determinations, therefore, which historians draw are often inspired by friendly or hateful motives. We possess, he believed, many more tiny details of the past than those which appear in the pages of our histories; consequently Sorel questioned the basis of the historian's choice: "N'y a-t-il pas beaucoup de petites raisons qui peuvent avoir eu une influence disproportionnée à leur importance normale? Dans la masse des faits négligées se trouvent peut-être ceux qui furent décisifs?"⁶⁵ Renan had noted, Sorel reported, that in many instances accidents had been able to alter the course of history, and

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 7. Sorel noted a more narrow scope for psychology: "La connaissance psychologique ne serait possible qu'à la condition de se borner aux exploits de quelques hommes," p. 8. "This totality which understands all the motives and character of actors of drama, this profound reality of which psychology speaks with so much emphasis because it is unaware of it, it is the mysterious thing in itself--that physicians forego to follow in nature."

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 8. Sorel concluded that a truly scientific discernment ". . . entre les causes est manifestement impossible," p. 9. "Are there not many little reasons that are able to have had a disproportionate influence to their normal importance? In the mass of neglected fact perhaps are found those that were decisive."

although he had been reproached for lowering the scientific dignity of history as a result of this affirmation, Sorel concluded that " . . . on arrive à voir que les plus grands événements peuvent avoir dépendu de ces petits accidents. . . ." ⁶⁶ In reality, Sorel believed that historians proceeded by making arbitrary choices which they tactfully identify as their "historical sense," with the result that " . . . ce qui est essentiel pour l'un devient secondaire pour l'autre." ⁶⁷

The second historical system which Georges Sorel entitled "système scientifique," was incapable of being applied to all the epochs of the past. This system required for its application the existence of " . . . une grande régularité dans les aspects que présent le passé." ⁶⁸ It assumed that the accidents which excited ancient spectators had little interest for the new generations, and it assumed that the important personages were founded upon the masses. Sorel likened what he called the "apparent regularity or order" to that which resulted from a calculation of probabilities; it was not

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 9. " . . . we happen to notice that the greatest events can have depended on these little accidents."

⁶⁷ Ibid. " . . . that which is essential for one becomes secondary for the other."

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 15. " . . . a great regularity in the aspects that present the past."

a regularity which could be explained but an order which was observed:

. . . c'est la combinaison d'une infinité de hasards dans le désordre le plus absolue des causes qui produit l'ordre apparent. Mais tous les hasards ne se combinent pas de la même manière; c'est ce qui savent toutes les personnes qui se sont occupées du calcul des probabilités.⁶⁹

When this regularity existed, Sorel continued, history appeared as giving birth to something which remained an acquisition of civilization. These events were studied and explained formerly as the intervention of a supernatural force, ". . . pour corriger les hasards dus à l'activité désordonnée de l'homme."⁷⁰

According to Sorel, Renan had believed that three such providential histories had existed: the histories of Greece, Israel, and Rome. In the tableau of Renan, as it appeared to Sorel, Greece had founded, in its epoch, in addition to "l'humanisme rationnel et progressive," science, art, literature, philosophy, morality, politics, strategy, diplomacy and international-maritime

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 16. Sorel wrote: "Je n'insiste pas sur les raisons de cette régularité." His reference, however, for this conception was to Engels in his study on Feuerbach which he noted simply as Engels, Religion, philosophie, socialisme, p. 233 in a footnote in Le système historique de Renan, p. 16.

. . . it is the combination of an infinity of chances in the most absolute disorder of causes which produces the apparent order. But all chances do not combine together in the same manner; it is that which is known by everyone who occupied themselves with calculating the probabilities.

⁷⁰Ibid. ". . . in order to correct the chances due to the disordered activity of men."

law. The lacuna in the Greek experience was, according to Sorel's reading of Renan, " . . . elle méprisa les humbles et n'éprouva pas le besoin d'un Dieu juste."⁷¹ This lacuna had been filled by Judaism and later Christianity, Renan believed, and Rome, thanks to its civic virtues, created the force which " . . . a servi à propager l'oeuvre grecque et l'oeuvre juive."⁷² Sorel disagreed with this tableau. In terms of historical epistemology he remained convinced that the origins of these movements were other than supernatural: " . . . c'est toujours du hasard qui engendre l'histoire."⁷³

For Sorel there was no inherent conflict between theology and the desire scientifically to study morals, institutions and ideas. The question for Sorel was not the "truth" of, for example, the resurrection of Jesus, but the potent image of Jesus which the belief in the resurrection engendered: "Le grand fait du christianisme naissant est la croyance à la résurrection, comment une

⁷¹Ibid., p. 17. " . . . it scorned the humble and did not feel the need of a just God."

⁷²Ibid. " . . . has served to propagate Jewish and Greek work."

⁷³Ibid., p. 20. Elaborating further Sorel observed: "L'instinct proteste cependant contre cette identification; c'est que les origines . . . nous semblent appeler intervention de forces supérieures . . . mais pour histoire scientifique tous . . . sont des hasards."
" . . . it is always chance which breeds history."

telle croyance s'est-elle formée, il est fort inutile de se le demander."⁷⁴ Sorel insisted that the historian must constantly battle against what he called the prejudice of total causality; historical studies, he believed, could never be exhausted. His advice was for the historian to confine himself to " . . . ce que l'on juge digne d'intéresser et d'instruire le monde moderne."⁷⁵

In contrast, the modern theologian, Sorel noted, did not want to accept this subjective limitation, he wanted the objective and complete truth. "The sociological historian, Sorel charged, who wants to reveal the future is obliged to introduce supreme, occult forces such as: the progress of the human mind, the democratic evolution, the tendency toward equality, immanent justice, etc."⁷⁶ All these "marionnettes," Sorel warned, were designed to replace the ancient idea of providence; they had become the new irresistible motive forces of history.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 21. Referring to the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, Sorel wrote: "Il est donc inutile de discuter sur les incidents qui peuvent avoir donné naissance à la croyance relative à la résurrection de Lazare; la question est de savoir si cette croyance a produit quelque chose dans l'histoire du christianisme. . . ." p. 37. "The great fact of dawning Christianity is the belief in the resurrection, how such a belief is formed, it is strongly useless to ask."

⁷⁵Ibid. " . . . that which they judge worthy to interest and instruct the modern world."

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 23.

Renan, Sorel continued, had the idea that history was an art of invention, and in the opening pages of his Vie de Jésus, Sorel quoted Renan as writing that for history " . . . une part de divination et de conjecture doit être permise."⁷⁷ Sorel was astonished to discover from reading the manuals of the professional historians that they had failed to comprehend what he agreed was the aesthetic nature of their studies: "Ils ne paraissent point savoir que toutes les règles de la critique n'ont de sens que sous la réserve que leur application est subordonnée à un considération esthétique."⁷⁸ He applauded Renan for having the "bon sens" to realize that historical texts had need of interpretation in the light of taste, (l'interprétation du goût) and Sorel ventured the suggestion that the hypercriticism (l'hypercritique) which he believed had spoiled many professional historians could only be effectively combatted by an improved sense of aesthetics.

In order for the study of history to be scientific, Sorel concluded, it must rid itself of the pretention of satisfying all of the curiosities of the reader. The

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 26. Sorel's reference: Renan, Vie de Jésus, pp. C-CI. " . . . a part of divination and conjecture must be permitted."

⁷⁸ Sorel, Le système historique de Renan, p. 27. "They do not seem to know that all rules of critique have sense only under the reservation that their application is subjected to a aesthetic consideration."

historian, like the physicist, Sorel observed, must reject the ambitions of Plato and Descartes and accept the limitations of his research. This scientific honesty, Sorel believed, would permit " . . . un concordat entre la théologie et la science."⁷⁹ Historical explications, he believed, were simple clarifications: " . . . elle consiste à grouper en système les conditions au milieu desquelles se produisent les événements, sans jamais atteindre la génération elle-même."⁸⁰ The generation itself Sorel insisted could be imagined in an infinite number of ways and historians were not capable of discerning the accidents, combinations and illusions which constituted the past reality. The theologians, he believed, were not happy with this admission because they sought to separate the human and the divine in the world, and because of this search for divinity they rejected what they called the "exterior" side of things. But the problems which the theologians posed, Sorel considered " . . . étrangers à l'histoire."⁸¹ The historian, Sorel added, had no need of such theologic ground; the question

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 457. " . . . an agreement between theology and science."

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 458. " . . . it consists to group in a system the conditions in the midst of which events are produced, without ever attaining the generation itself."

⁸¹Ibid. " . . . strangers to history."

of origins, he concluded, was extremely problematical for historians, because of this impossibility of constructing explicative systems.

Les Préoccupations Métaphysiques Des
Physiciens Moderne

Writing in an essay of 1905, entitled "The Metaphysical Preoccupations of Modern Physics," Sorel reaffirmed certain anxieties in the various branches of knowledge over the nature of the relationships which at that moment existed between science and nature.⁸² Each branch of science, Sorel believed, must formulate its own response to this anxiety, and his interest in physics was directed to the possibility of applying mathematics to the understanding of nature. Sorel noted that contemporary physicists " . . . ont trouvé qu'il est impossible de connaître l'essence des choses."⁸³ They had, he continued, come to recognize that the system of mathematics was situated between phenomena and the physicist and further that the images by means

⁸² Georges Sorel, "Les préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes," Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, XIII (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1905). (Hereinafter referred to as "Les préoccupations.")

⁸³ Ibid., p. 860. Sorel commented that these conclusions were quite similar to those of Kant although he noted it was doubtful they had " . . . viennent de la lecture de la Critique," instead he thought that " . . . c'est la technique du calcul infinitésimal qui les a conduit à cette doctrine." " . . . have found that it is impossible to know the essence of things."

of which reality was represented were chosen because of their simplicity and convenience. Sorel concluded that ". . . des raisons plutôt esthétique que scientifiques qui dirigent dans le choix des hypothèses."⁸⁴ Following a logic of ideas, Sorel reported, Henri Poincaré had wondered ". . . if the savant had not been duped by his own definitions and if the world which he believed to discover was not simply the creation of his own caprice?"⁸⁵ Sorel believed that what he called a "mobile-harmony" existed between nature and science, and he identified the goal of experimental science as the construction of ". . . une 'nature artificielle' (si on peut employer ce terme) à la place de la 'nature naturelle.'"⁸⁶ But this conclusion included the assumption, Sorel insisted, that there were no necessary hypotheses because ". . . toute hypothèse est

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 864. ". . . reasons, aesthetic rather than scientific which directed the choice of hypotheses."

⁸⁵Ibid. Sorel quoted simply Poincaré, La Science et l'hypothèse, p. 3. Full of admiration for this work Sorel wrote: "Je me reporterai très souvent à ce livre, dans lequel le grand géomètre a groupé, d'une manière particulièrement claire, toutes les difficultés que rencontre la théorie de la science moderne." "Les pré-occupations," footnote 1, p. 862.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 880. ". . . an 'artificial nature' (if one can employ this term) in the place of 'natural nature.'"

l'introduction d'un mécanisme étranger à la nature."⁸⁷

Sorel speculated that an hypothesis would be more perfect in so far as it made no claim to imitate nature. It had been an error, Sorel charged, to seek to conceal the contradiction which existed between science and nature.

Science was for Sorel as infinite as the inventive genius of human beings which he noted " . . . ne semble comporter aucune limite; chaque pas que nous faisons dans la voie du progrès; nous montre que nous n'avons encore trouvé que très peu de choses et que nous aurions la possibilité de réaliser beaucoup de combinaisons imprévues."⁸⁸ Comparing his own time to the eighteenth century Sorel noted, "Although we possess a mechanics so prodigiously rich in comparison with that of the last century, we have nevertheless acquired the sense of our ignorance; while our fathers had on the contrary a singular sense of their knowledge and they believed that the domaine of the unknown receded rapidly before their

⁸⁷Ibid. Sorel credited Poincaré with this conclusion. " . . . every hypothesis is the introduction of a mechanism foreign to nature."

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 881-82. Quoting from M. J. Bertrand, D'Alembert, p. 41 (Sorel's incomplete citation) Sorel added: "Plus une methode est nouvelle et féconde, plus elle étend le champ de l'inconnu," p. 882. " . . . seemed to carry no limit; each step that we make on the path of progress shows us that we have still only found very little of things and that we will have the possibility to realize many unforeseen combinations."

efforts."⁸⁹ Sorel believed that what he called the natural world and the artificial world were constituted according to "des principes opposés" and that this opposition would become more and more clear as science advanced.

Georges Sorel concluded his observations on the metaphysical anxieties of modern physicists with the speculation that there existed between nature and science what he called "la zone du hasard." He wrote: "A vraiment parler, il n'y a pas de loi de la nature," and he charged that modern physicists ". . . n'osent pas généralement s'avouer à eux-mêmes, d'une manière bien explicite, que la science et la nature forment deux mondes séparés par les phénomènes irréversibles."⁹⁰

Sorel concluded that there were only relative movements in the world, and he thought that the savants of his day no longer believed in determinism, although he complained of the lingering prejudices of a discredited determinism and demanded of science to openly avow the new doctrine which corresponded to its contemporary practice.

⁸⁹Ibid. In a footnote, Sorel chided the idea of progress of the eighteenth century: "De là vient l'extraordinaire naïveté de la théorie du progrès chez Condorcet."

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 887-88. "Truly speaking there is no law of nature," "or generally do not dare to avow to themselves, in a very explicit manner that science and nature form two separate worlds by irreversible phenomena."

APPENDIX A

AESTHETICS, SOCIOLOGY, HISTORY
AND PHYSICS

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO
BENEDETTO CROCE: 1901 - 1905

30 avril 1901

"Je vous remercie de votre note sur Vico . . . "
(G. B. Vico primo scopritore della scienza estetica;
Napoli, 1901), p. 363

4 janvier 1902

"Je n'ai pas de tirage à part de mon article sur Vico;
il n'en a pas été faite." p. 366

24 octobre 1902

"Je vous ai envoyé quelques exemplaires du prospectus
de Péguy (nous avons été ensemble à son bureau à
Paris); son oeuvre est très intéressante et ce qu'il
écrit mérite d'être lu; d'ailleurs, il est du petit
nombre des dreyfuistes qui ne réclament pas la
liberté uniquement pour eux et leurs amis." p. 370

30 mars 1903

" . . . je n'aime pas beaucoup les théories générales
sur l'évolution; mais c'est une mode à laquelle peu
de gens osent se soustraire." p. 371

28 avril 1903

" . . . je ne me suis jamais posé, moi-même, la
question de savoir quelle serait la synthèse de mes
écrits divers. J'écris au jour le jour suivant le
besoin du moment." p. 372

9 mai 1903

" . . . à mon avis, le socialisme ferait bien de
dormir quelque temps: les classes ouvrières ne sont
guère en état de s'affranchir de la domination,
qu'exercent sur elles les bavards." p. 32

21 mai 1903

" . . . la sociologie, en voulant traiter 'physiquement' la science sociale, n'aboutit à rien; il faut se résoudre à considérer les notions avec leur mobilité et leur variété." p. 32

25 septembre 1903

"Ici la politique anticléricale s'accuse de plus en plus et elle réussit beaucoup plus facilement qu'on ne pensait; elle a des racines très profondes dans le pays. L'Eglise mettra cinquante ans pour réparer le désastre où elle s'est jetée elle-même par suite de la politique folle de Léon XIII." p. 34

30 octobre 1903

"Il me semble que votre gouvernement veut singer le nôtre, en se rapprochant des socialistes: l'expérience a été chez nous funeste à tout le monde et a contribué à abaisser beaucoup la moralité déjà basse des partis politiques." p. 34

4 décembre 1903

"La science grecque offre à qui l'étudiera scientifiquement bien des surprises; l'esprit grec ne ressemble nullement au nôtre et je crois fort que cette différence tient, pour beaucoup, à l'économie." p. 35

20 décembre 1903

"Je me demande ce que pense la cour de Rome de tout ce qui se passe en France; les catholiques ne semblent pas comprendre la gravité des événements; nous marchons très vite à une séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat, plein de tiraillements mesquins." p. 35

23 janvier 1904

" . . . je crois que la politique sociale de Léon XIII était une farce." p. 35

28 novembre 1904

"Il me semble que L'Italie marche un peu--comme nous d'ailleurs--à la manière d'un ivrogne qui ne connaît plus bien les rues par lesquelles il passe. Il y a partout en Europe une légèreté intellectuelle vraiment singulière." p. 38

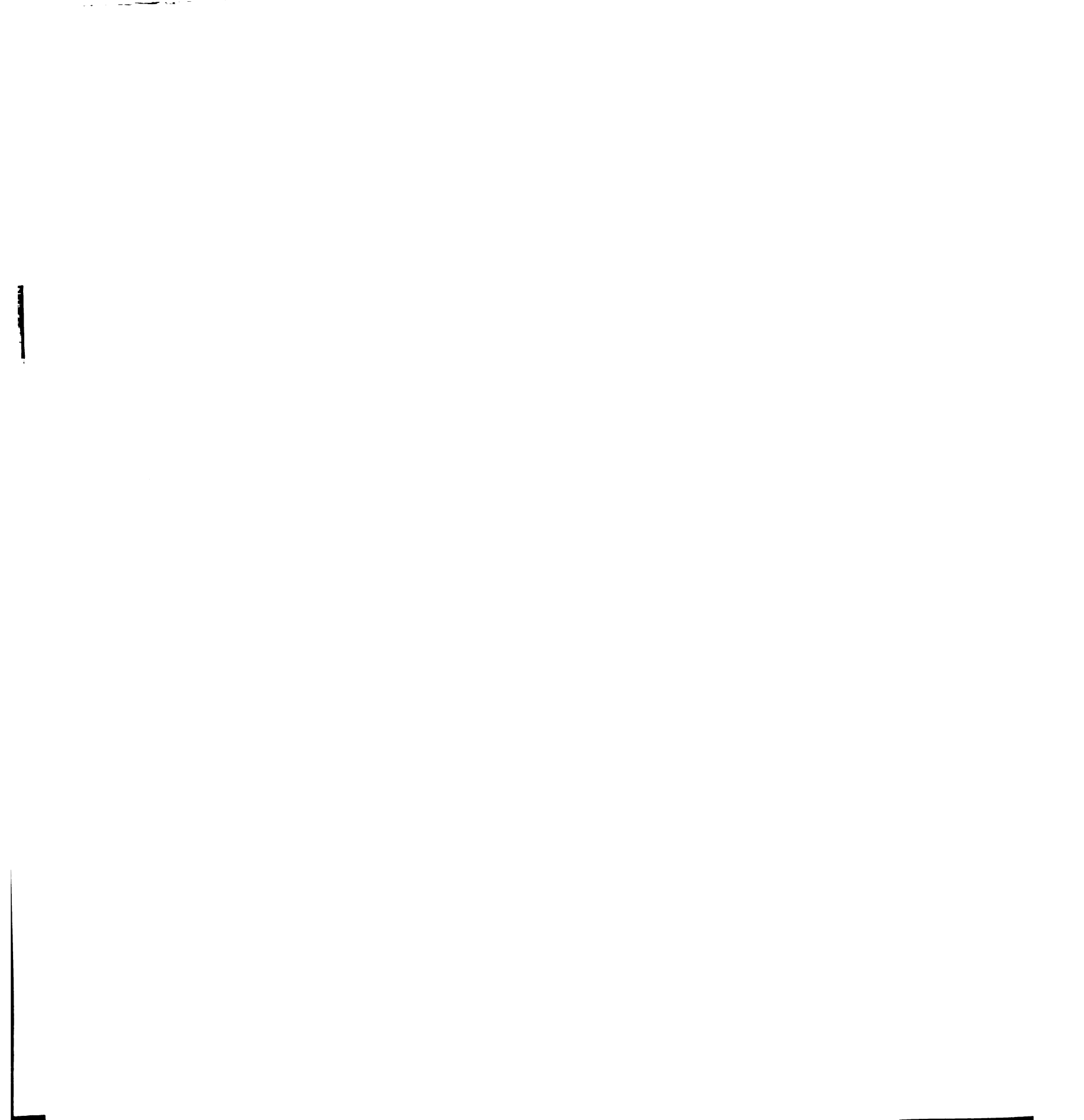
27 décembre 1905

"les idées que j'ai exposées dans l'Introduction (Le système historique de Renan) que vous avez lu ne plaisent pas aux savants: il leur paraît scandaleux de regarder le jugement esthétique comme la loi cachée de toute la critique historique. . . . P. Semera

m'écrit pour me signaler qu'elle est fort dangereuse il prend au sérieux la 'science des critiques'! J'espère qu'il y aura quelques bons esprits pour protester; comme moi, contre cette science fallacieuse que les Allemands ont fabriqué pour épater les Latins. L'histoire n'est utile et sérieuse qu'à la condition de bien reconnaître son caractère d'art constructif subordonné à des fins extrascientifiques et dans lequel les faits sont la partie la plus inutile." p. 93

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER V

Essays published by Georges Sorel between 1906 and 1908 in Le mouvement socialiste and considered in this chapter were later combined to form his two most widely known books: Reflections on Violence and The Illusions of Progress. In the opening analysis, Sorel discusses the Marxian concept of class conflict and the need to maintain opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie through the use of what he called "proletarian violence," which he distinguished from the state's use of force and coercion. Major concepts elaborated include Sorel's idea of Syndicalism and his notion of the general strike as the insulating and unifying myth of the proletariat. He proceeds to analyze myth from the social and epistemological standpoint and concluded that the parliamentary parties which advocated social peace were the greatest potential danger to the workers movement. Only Syndicalism, armed with the myth of the general strike, could develop the separation needed for the production of a morality based on mutuality--a stance which was in opposition to the



values of the contemporary bourgeois state. Sorel next undertakes a critique of the idea of progress and suggests its historical development as an aspect of a rising bourgeois oligarchy which the French monarchy had created for its service.

Sorel concludes Chapter V with an analysis of Jean Jacques Rousseau, whom he approaches from an aesthetic point of view, and Henri Bergson whose Creative Evolution Sorel conceives as a turning point in modern philosophy.

CHAPTER V

LE MOUVEMENT SOCIALISTE,

1906 - 1908

Réflexions Sur La Violence

In January, 1906, an essay appeared in Le mouvement socialiste, entitled "Réflexions sur la Violence" by Georges Sorel.¹ In a brief introduction, Sorel described to the readers of this periodical what he noticed to be an oversight by certain "wise sociologists" whom, he charged, concealed (dissimuler) the role which violence played in the normal evolution of strikes. Sorel suggested that it was vital " . . . chercher quel est le rôle qui appartient à la violence dans les rapports sociaux actuels;"² especially in view of his belief that revolutionary syndicalism was tending to dominate contemporary socialism. Sorel purposed to

¹Georges Sorel, "Réflexions sur la Violence," Le mouvement socialiste, XVIII (Paris: Edouard Cornély et Cie., January 15, 1906). (Hereinafter referred to as "Réflexions sur la Violence.")

²Ibid., p. 5. " . . . to find what the role of violence is in present social relations."

examine the confluence of feelings which dominated masses, and to avoid the psychological examination of important individuals which he noted was not a useful undertaking: " . . . pour l'historien philosophe . . . c'est l'ensemble des choses et non la génération des états de conscience qui importe."³ Violent activities which occurred outside the law were from certain points of view considered meritorious. The perpetrators of these acts could more easily be appreciated as great men by the directors of government and law when they were no longer alive: " . . . on a toujours plus de vertus que les gens qui restent et qui peuvent être des concurrents."⁴

Sorel proceeded to a consideration of what he called "la lutte de classe et la violence," and insisted there could be no understanding of Socialism until the concept of "la lutte de classe" was given a precise

³Ibid., p. 6. Reflections on Violence, translated into English by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth, The Free Press, 1950, must be read with extreme caution; this quote has been completely omitted from their version (see p. 68) and their claim to having translated the "Introduction to the First Publication" (see p. 67) as it appeared in Le mouvement socialiste, does not explain the presence of footnotes in their version which do not occur in the original. Therefore, I have relied on the original French consulting the Hulme-Roth translations only in Chapter I of this study. " . . . for the philosophical historian . . . it is the totality of things and not the generating of states of conscience which are of consequence."

⁴Sorel, "Réflexions sur la Violence," p. 7.
" . . . they always have more virtue than people who remain and who are able to be competitive."

meaning. The misunderstanding of this Marxian concept he attributed largely to the great role which the " . . . idolâtrie des mots joue . . . dans l'histoire de toutes les idéologies."⁵ Contemporary socialism, Sorel charged, had, because of its electoral tactics and because of its willingness to become the arbitor of social peace, contributed to an anti-Marxist transformation. To comprehend the potential consequences of this transformation, Sorel insisted " . . . il faut se reporter aux conception que se faisait Marx sur le passage du capitalisme au socialisme."⁶ Marx, Sorel believed, had assumed a long, continuous and energetic period of capitalist construction whose termination was to be the work of the proletariat who would conserve the acquisitions of the capitalist economy while at the same time it would " . . . rompre tout lien avec l'idéologie des temps actuels."⁷ The socialists, therefore, Sorel concluded, must disavow the search for the means of leading the bourgeoisie to an enlightened sense of a superior law; their sole function must be to clarify for the proletariat

⁵Ibid., p. 12. " . . . idolatry of words plays in history in all ideologies."

⁶Ibid., p. 42. " . . . it is necessary to refer to the conception Marx made on the passage from capitalism to socialism."

⁷Ibid., p. 43. " . . . break all ties with the ideology of present time."

the grandeur of its revolutionary role. The proletariat must, in Sorel's conception, be insulated from the corruption of "la pensée bourgeoise," and it must " . . . développer des formations embryonnaires qui apparaissent dans les sociétés de résistance, pour arriver à construire des institutions qui n'ont point de modèle dans l'histoire de la bourgeoisie."⁸ This goal could not be accomplished, Sorel warned, if the bourgeoisie and the proletariat were not rigorously opposed to one another with all the power at their disposal: " . . . plus la bourgeoisie sera ardemment capitaliste, plus le prolétariat sera plein d'un esprit de guerre et confiant dans la force révolutionnaire, plus le mouvement sera assuré."⁹

But if the two opposing classes were to accept the idea of social peace, Sorel believed, the development of both would be hindered and " . . . le hasard s'introduit et l'avenir du monde est complètement indéterminé."¹⁰ Sorel conceived of Socialism as " . . . une philosophie

⁸Ibid. " . . . develop embryonic formations which appear in resistant societies in order to succeed in constructing institutions which have no model in bourgeois history."

⁹Ibid., pp. 43-44. " . . . the more the bourgeoisie is ardently capitalist, the more the proletariat will be full of war spirit and confident in revolutionary force, the more the movement will be assured."

¹⁰Ibid., p. 45. " . . . chance introduces itself and the future of the world is completely undetermined."

particulière de l'histoire."¹¹ The Socialist, he continued, ". . . imagines that he has been transported into a distant future such that present events can be considered as elements in a long development."¹² That this procedure implied an important use of hypothesis, was frankly accepted by Sorel who evaluated the role of hypothesis as indispensable: ". . . il n'y a point de philosophie sociale, point de considération sur l'évolution et même point d'action importante dans le présent, sans grandes hypothèses sur l'avenir."¹³ The movement away from conflict represented for Sorel what he called "the double movement of degeneration," and it was here he believed that violence could play a singularly great role in history: ". . . car elle peut opérer, d'une manière indirecte, sur les bourgeois, pour les rappeler au sentiment de leur classe."¹⁴ However, Sorel noted, these actions could have historical value only if they

¹¹Ibid., p. 6. ". . . a particular philosophy of history."

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid. ". . . there is no social philosophy, no consideration on evolution, and even no important present action, without great hypotheses on the future."

¹⁴Ibid., p. 46. ". . . for it can operate in an indirect manner on the bourgeoisie to recall to them their class sentiment."

were the clear and brutal expressions of class conflict. Sorel (who often used the term "employers" [patrons] interchangeably with the bourgeoisie) accepted the need to deflect the bourgeoisie from "ill-advised compromise," and to return them to the creation of productive economic forces,¹⁵ and to this end violence seemed to him a particularly effective tool. Proletarian violence was the needed antidote to social peace, because it could restore the separation of the classes and thus recover the dynamic opposition necessary to insure the future revolution. Proletarian violence had become for Georges Sorel " . . . un facteur essentiel du marxisme."¹⁶

Les Préjugés Contre La Violence

In February, 1906, Sorel published an essay entitled "Les Préjugés contre la Violence" in Le mouvement socialiste in which he tried to distinguish between the revolutionary violence which France had known in 1793 and his conception of Syndicalist

¹⁵Thus the inadequacy of the translation by Hulme and Roth (see note 3), who render "la bourgeoisie" as "the middle class," throughout.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 48. Behind this call for a restored and reinvigorated bourgeoisie was Sorel's fear that the revolution might have quite different consequences if it did not occur while the economic system was at its highest point of capitalistic development--thus the need for the bourgeoisie to complete what Sorel saw as its historical mission. " . . . an essential factor of Marxism."

violence.¹⁷ The civil uprisings of the great revolutionary days of July 14 and August 10 had, Sorel believed, lost their epical appeal because of " . . . the battles which bloodied (ensanglantèrent) Paris in 1848 and in 1871." There could be no popular epic, Sorel speculated " . . . de chose que le peuple ne peut se représenter comme reproductible dans un avenir prochain."¹⁸ And Sorel was persuaded that the experiences of 1848 and 1871 had taught the people that the government could not be overthrown " . . . par des émeutes sembables au 14 juillet et 10 août."¹⁹ What remained, Sorel charged, was the use of the power of the state: police operations, proscriptions and servile courts. Political justice in a country so often placed in upheaval by changes in

¹⁷ See Appendix A for a complete list of Sorel's contributions to Le mouvement socialiste during 1906. The several essays which later became the book-length study Réflexions sur la Violence, Rivière, Paris, 1908, are noted there.

¹⁸ Georges Sorel, "Les Préjugés contre la Violence," le mouvement socialiste (Fevrièr, 1906), p. 145. Sorel also believed that " . . . la poésie populaire s'applique bien plutôt au futur qu'au passé." Ibid., p. 145. " . . . a thing that people can represent as reproducible in a near future."

¹⁹ Ibid. " . . . by similar riots of July 14 and August 10."

government was especially odious to Sorel " . . . parce que le criminel d'aujourd'hui peut devenir le juge de demain."²⁰

The famous law of the 22nd Prairial of Robespierre, which detailed that the proof necessary to condemn the "enemies of the people" consisted of any document:

. . . soit matérielle, soit morale, soit verbale, soit écrite, qui peut naturellement obtenir l'assentiment de tout esprit juste et raisonnable. La règle des jugements est la conscience des jurés éclairés par l'amour de la patrie; leur but est le triomphe de la République et la ruine de ses ennemis.²¹

This law according to Sorel was the strongest expression of the theory of the predominance of the state. Sorel expressed the belief that people of his time were less dominated by what he called "la superstition du Dieu-Etat"; but in the Dreyfus affair he noted there was a tendency among officers and priests to " . . . trouvait

²⁰Ibid. This explained why Parliamentary Socialists, Sorel noted, make such a great effort to persuade the public of their hatred for violence: "Ils se donneraient volontier pour les protecteurs de la bourgeoisie . . ." p. 146. " . . . because the criminal of today can become the judge of tomorrow."

²¹Ibid., p. 153.
 . . . either material or moral or verbal or written which can naturally obtain the assent of every just and reasonable spirit. The rule of judgments is the conscience of juries illuminated by love of country; their goal is the triumph of the Republic and the ruin of its enemies.

tout naturelle une condamnation pour raison d'Etat."²²
 The Dreyfus case was hardly concluded, he charged, when
 the government of Republican Defense initiated its own
 political prosecution in the name of "la raison d'Etat."
 Thus experience had demonstrated that " . . . nos
 révolutionnaires arguent de la raison d'Etat des qu'ils
 sont parvenus au pouvoir."²³ The Parliamentary Socialists,
 as well, he charged, had preserved the ancient cult of
 the state and were thus prepared to commit the same crimes
 as the Ancien Régime; if they achieved power, Sorel
 speculated, " . . . ils se montreraient de bons suc-
 cesseurs de l'Inquisition, de l'Ancien Régime et de
 Robespierre."²⁴

Sorel distinguished between these acts and pro-
 letarian violence which served to mark the separation of
 classes. Proletarian violence was, he believed, " . . .
 purement et simplement des actes de guerre," carried on
 without hate and without the spirit of vengeance.²⁵

²²Ibid., p. 156. " . . . find entirely natural
 a condemnation for reasons of State."

²³Ibid., p. 158. " . . . our revolutionaries
 argue from reasons of State as soon as they have come to
 power."

²⁴Ibid., p. 161. " . . . they would show them-
 selves to be good successors of the Inquisition, the Old
 Regime and Robespierre."

²⁵Ibid.

The goal of Syndicalism, Sorel insisted, was to realize Marx's idea of the Socialist revolution and did not aim to replace one governing minority with another. Syndicalism did not, he believed, aim to possess the state's power, but to eliminate that power and in this it could be distinguished from Parliamentary Socialism which, Sorel believed, committed the error of " . . . attaquent plutôt les hommes au pouvoir que le pouvoir lui-même."²⁶ And because the national army was, according to Sorel, the clearest most tangible manifestation of the state, Syndicalism was engaged in anti-militarist propaganda. Whereas those who sought the power of the state for themselves would, he insisted, become aware on the day that they took control of the government that " . . . ils auraient besoin d'une armée; ils feraient de la politique étrangère et, par suite, auraient, eux aussi, à vanter le dévouement à la patrie."²⁷ But for Syndicalism there was an absolute opposition against the state which took the concrete form of anti-patriotism. Sorel concluded by distinguishing between what he called the "acts of savagery" committed during the bourgeois revolution in 1893, which he claimed resulted from a superstitious

²⁶Ibid., p. 163. " . . . attacking the men in power rather than power itself."

²⁷Ibid. " . . . they would need an army; they would make foreign policy and consequently would have to praise the devotion to the fatherland."

conception of the state which the bourgeoisie had "inherited from the Christian church and the monarchy," and the violence perpetrated in the course of strikes by proletarians who sought the overthrow of the state.²⁸

La Grève Générale Prolétarienne

In March, 1906, Sorel published "la Grève Générale prolétarienne," an essay in which he introduced his influential conception of the general strike as that which characterized the true current of the proletarian revolutionary movement. Instead of confusing such concepts as class conflict by adhering at the same time to ideas of national solidarity and sacred patriotic duty as Sorel charged the parliamentary Socialists had done, the Syndicalists, he believed, should find the means to clarify and emphasize the opposition between the classes. Yet ordinary language, he believed " . . . ne saurait suffire pour produire de tels résultats; il faut faire appel à des ensembles d'images capables d'évoquer en bloc et par la seule intuition, avant toute analyse réfléchie, la masse des sentiments qui correspondent aux diverses manifestations de la guerre engagée par le socialisme

²⁸Ibid., p. 164.

contre la société moderne."²⁹ The drama of the general strike, Sorel believed, would serve this purpose perfectly.³⁰

Sorel continued to believe that the future was beyond the scope of scientific analysis. It remained beyond the capacity of man to know in advance the success of various hypotheses. Nevertheless, he noted, man continued to reason as if he could project himself into the future and experience demonstrated, he insisted that these constructions could have great efficacy. These anticipations of the future, Sorel continued, could be regarded as myths, " . . . comme des compositions faites avec art, en vue de donner un aspect de réalité à des espoirs sur lesquels s'appuie la conduite présente."³¹

²⁹ Georges Sorel, "La Grève Générale prolétarienne," Le mouvement socialiste (Mars, 1906). (Hereinafter referred to as "La Grève Générale."), p. 260. " . . . would not know how to produce such results; it is necessary to call the totality of images capable of evoking in mass and by a single intuition, before all reflected analysis, the mass of sentiments which correspond to diverse manifestations of the war engaged in by socialism against modern society."

³⁰ Sorel noted that this conception was in accord with what he perceived as Henri Bergson's thesis of the superiority of "la connaissance totale" over analysis. Ibid., p. 261.

³¹ Ibid., p. 263. " . . . like compositions made with art, in view of giving an aspect of reality to the hopes upon which present conduct rests."

Among the historical examples which demonstrated the role of myths, Sorel emphasized the first Christian's expectation of the return of Christ and the ensuing ruin of the pagan world. This catastrophe, expected at the end of the first Christian generation, did not occur, but the "mythe apocalyptique," according to Sorel, was a great benefit to the early Christian movement. Sorel concluded that a detailed knowledge of what the myth contained which would actually form the history of the future was of little importance. Admitting that a myth could remain totally unfulfilled, Sorel nevertheless insisted: ". . . Il faut juger les mythes comme des moyens d'agir sur le présent et toute discussion sur la manière de les appliquer matériellement sur le cours de l'histoire est dépourvu de sens."³² If, he asserted, the imaginary picture of the general strike were totally wrong, it might still prove to have been ". . . un élément de force de premier ordre" by giving a precision and rigidity to revolutionary thought that no other manner of thinking could have effected; and Sorel added: ". . . l'idée de grève générale est si bien adaptée à l'âme ouvrière qu'elle peut la dominer de la manière

³²Ibid., p. 265. ". . . it is necessary to judge myths as means to act on the present and all discussion on the manner of applying them materially on the course of history is senseless."

la plus absolue et ne laisser aucune place aux désirs que peuvent satisfaire les parlements."³³

The incorporation of the concept of the general strike into the Marxian system of thought was aided, Sorel believed, by the identity of methodology which he found in both. The true method of Marx, Sorel believed, recognized a principle which had been stated by Henri Bergson, namely that " . . . des idées vraies et fécondes . . . sont autant de prises de contact avec des courants de réalité."³⁴ There were no intuitions of reality and no intellectual sympathy with its most intimate parts, Sorel noted agreeing with Bergson, without an exhaustive exposure to the facts which only begin to appear superficial when they have been massively accumulated and fused to obtain what Bergson called "une expérience intégrale." What had nullified every attempt in Germany to perfect Marxism, Sorel charged, was " . . . le respect superstitieux voué par la social-démocratie

³³Ibid., p. 268. " . . . the idea of the general strike is so well adapted to the worker's soul that it can dominate in the most absolute manner and leave no place to the desires which can satisfy parliaments."

³⁴Sorel referenced this quote to an article by Henri Bergson entitled "Introduction a la metaphysique" published in 1903 in Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 12th cahier of the 4th series, p. 21. " . . . true and fertile ideas are so much solidified by contacts with currents of reality."

à la scolastique de ses doctrines."³⁵ But Marx had said, according to Sorel, that on the day of the revolution, the proletariat would be disciplined, united and organized. Sorel thought that the terms which Marx used to describe the preparation for the decisive combat were not to be taken literally. Marx sought to provide the understanding that the preparation of the proletariat " . . . dépend uniquement de l'organisation d'une résistance obstinée, croissante et passionnée contre l'ordre de choses existant."³⁶ To support this analysis, Sorel noted that it would be impossible to conceive the disappearance of capitalistic dominance without supposing an ardent sentiment of revolt. But this sentiment, he believed was weakened by vanity and materialistic desires leading to "scandaleuses conversions." The concept of the catastrophic general strike, Sorel asserted, would make of every conflict a symptom of a state of war, and through it every strike would " . . . engendre la perspective d'une catastrophe totale."³⁷ Thanks to the

³⁵Sorel, "La Grève Générale," p. 271. " . . . the superstitious respect vowed by social democrats to the scholastics of their doctrines."

³⁶Ibid., p. 277. " . . . depends uniquely on the organization of an obstinate growing and passionate resistance against the order of existing things."

³⁷Ibid., p. 275. " . . . engender the perspective of total catastrophe."

concept of the general strike, the necessary line of cleavage would never be in danger of disappearing. Marx's thought, Sorel noted, was hampered by the absence of knowledge gained from experience--he had not seen the great and numerous strikes which the future had in store, and thus Sorel believed Syndicalism was a formal adjustment within Marxism.

Sorel also recognized an epistemological bias, produced by what he called an insufficient education, which would hinder the acceptance of the syndicalist position which he was elaborating. Because eighteenth century astronomy had been able to calculate the tables of the moon, Sorel charged, the goal of all science was taken to be the accurate forecasting of the future. Science was seen, he continued, as the remedy of all social defects as well. The followers of "la science vaine et fausse . . . supposait que toute chose est susceptible d'être rapportée à une loi mathématique."³⁸ Yet Sorel charged there were many illusions in a sociology which believed that when it had attained clarity of expression it had attained truth. The Positivists, whom Sorel charged had believed that philosophy

³⁸Ibid., p. 285. They believed, Sorel added, ". . . suivant une fameuse formule de Kant il y a de scientifique dans toute connaissance exactement ce que celle-ci renferme de mathématique." Ibid. ". . . vain and false science suppose that everything is susceptible to be related to a mathematical law."



would be eliminated by their science, had been disillusioned, he believed by Henri Bergson whose methodology was opposed to that of science. Through Bergson, Sorel believed, metaphysics had regained lost ground " . . . en montrant à l'homme l'illusion de prétendues solutions scientifiques et en ramenant l'esprit vers la région mystérieuse."³⁹ Religion, Sorel added, contrary to the Positivist's forecasts, was not on the point of disappearing. And in the realm of art, Sorel noted, the impotence of speech to describe paintings was an important revelation; art, he believed, flourished best on mystery, half-shades, and indeterminate outlines; " . . . plus le discours est méthodique et parfait, plus il est de nature à supprimer tout ce qui distingue un chef-d'oeuvre."⁴⁰

The limitations of scientific epistemology and scientific sociology were, according to Sorel, a function of the fact that in every complex body of knowledge a clear and an obscure region could be detected. It was his belief that the obscure region might be the most important: "L'erreur de médiocres consiste à admettre

³⁹ Ibid., p. 286. " . . . in showing man the illusion of pretended scientific solutions and to bring spirit back to the mysterious region."

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 288. " . . . the more perfect and methodical the discourse, the more natural it is to suppress all that distinguishes a masterpiece."

que cette deuxième partie doit disparaître par le progrès des lumières."⁴¹ Yet Sorel indignantly refused to excuse this assumption in the realm of art and especially in modern painting which he thought expressed combinations of nuances to which no attention had been paid formerly due to their lack of stability and the difficulty of expressing them in words.⁴² Socialism too, Sorel believed, was necessarily obscure: ". . . aucun effort de la pensée, aucun progrès des connaissances, aucun induction raisonnable ne pourront jamais faire disparaître le mystère qui enveloppe le socialisme."⁴³ This obscurity was the result, Sorel believed, of the words with which one attempted to express the ends of socialism and therein he saw the importance of that construction of the proletarian mind which he called the general strike.

⁴¹Ibid. "The error of mediocres consists in admitting that this second part must disappear by the progress of enlightenment."

⁴²In a footnote, which did not occur in the original essay in Le mouvement socialiste but which appeared in the English edition cited in footnote number 3, Sorel is quoted as saying: "It is to the credit of the Impressionists that they showed that these fine shades can be rendered by painting," p. 164.

⁴³Sorel, "La Grève Générale," p. 293. ". . . no effort of thought, no progress of knowledge, no reasonable induction could ever make the mystery which surrounds socialism disappear."

La Grève Générale Politique

In April, 1906, Georges Sorel published "la grève Générale politique" in Le mouvement socialiste in which he suggested a distinction between the conceptions of force and violence. Sorel believed that force, in his analysis, had as its object the imposition of a certain social order, while violence tended to the destruction of that order. To this extent he concluded:

" . . . la bourgeoisie a employé la force depuis le début des temps modernes, tandis que le prolétariat réagit maintenant contre elle et contre l'Etat par la violence."⁴⁴ According to Sorel, the capitalist system came into being through the exploitation of the power of the state by the bourgeoisie; quoting from Marx he reported: "Quelques unes de ces méthodes reposent sur l'emploi de la force brutale; mais toutes, sans exception, exploitent le pouvoir de l'Etat, la force concentrée et organisée de la société, afin de précipiter violemment le passage de l'ordre économique féodal à l'ordre économique capitaliste, et d'abréger les phases de transition."⁴⁵ This evolution represented for Sorel

⁴⁴ Georges Sorel, "La Grève Générale politique," le mouvement socialiste (Avril, 1906), p. 418. (Hereinafter referred to as "La Grève Générale politique.")
" . . . the bourgeoisie has used force since the beginning of modern times, while the proletariat reacts now against it and against the state by violence."

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 421. Sorel reference: Capital, *Tome I*, vol. 1, p. 336. "Some of these methods rest on

the history of bourgeoisie force, and he credited Marx with having uncovered its details, while at the same time complaining of the gap in Marx's work on the subject of the organization of the proletariat. Thus the followers of Marx who prided themselves on being orthodox, Sorel charged, had never suspected that a distinction should have been drawn " . . . entre la force qui marche vers l'autorité et cherche à réaliser une obéissance automatique, et la violence qui veut briser cette autorité."⁴⁶ They mistakenly believed, he charged, that the proletariat must acquire force as the bourgeoisie did, and must finally end by establishing a socialist state to replace the bourgeois state; to accomplish these ends a parliamentary Socialist party was formed.

Contrary to this conception, Sorel could not accept the idea that the historical mission of the proletariat was to imitate the bourgeoisie, and he insisted on the distinction between "proletarian violence" as symbolized by the concept of the general strike, and "bourgeoisie force" which operated, he believed, through

the use of brutal force; but all without exception exploit the power of the State, concentrated and organized force of society in order to violently precipitate the passage of the feudal economic order to capitalist economic order and to shorten the phases of transition."

⁴⁶Sorel, "La Grève Générale politique," p. 423.
" . . . between force which moves toward authority and tries to realize automatic obedience and violence which wishes to break this authority."

the mechanism of the state. In the context of this analysis, Sorel reaffirmed his distrust of the parliamentary Socialists who, he believed, sought political power and turned their backs on the general strike: "On peut encore dire que le grand danger qui menace le syndicalisme serait toute tentative d'imiter la démocratie."⁴⁷

La Moralité De La Violence--La
Morale Des Producteurs

Georges Sorel's ethical reservations with respect to violence formed the subject of a two-part essay entitled "La moralité de la violence--la morale des producteurs" which concluded his "Réflexions sur la Violence" and appeared in the joint-issue of Le mouvement socialiste dated May and June, 1906. He admitted that violence, when it passed certain limits, could become a danger to morality, but nonetheless he insisted on the need to consider violence from the point of view of its influence on social theory, and especially as an agent for the maintenance of " . . . la scission des classes qui est la base de tout le socialisme."⁴⁸ Without this cleavage, Sorel feared, Socialism would be unable to

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 426. "We could further say that the great danger which threatens syndicalism would be every attempt to imitate democracy."

⁴⁸Georges Sorel, "La moralité de la violence--La morale des producteurs," Le mouvement socialiste (May-June, 1906), p. 36. (Hereinafter referred to as "La moralite de la violence.") " . . . the class division which is the base of all socialism."

fulfill what he believed was its historical mission. Yet offenses of brutality, Sorel asserted, had come to be looked upon as something abnormal, to the extent that when the brutality was great one immediately wondered if the culprit was sane. This had not occurred because criminals had become more moral, Sorel noted. Their methods of operation had changed to suit the new economic conditions. Many sociologists discovered progress, Sorel charged, in so far as " . . . la férocité ancienne tend à être remplacée par la ruse."⁴⁹ Because money losses could easily be made good again, fraud had come to be regarded as less serious than brutality. This was especially true, Sorel noted, in a rich community like America where business was conducted on a large scale and in which everyone was wide awake in defense of his own interests. This explained for Sorel why " . . . les Américains supportent, sans trop se plaindre, les excès de leurs politiciens et de leurs financiers."⁵⁰ The

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 48. Sorel obviously disagreed, and quoting Hartmann, he noted: " . . . il ne faut pas oublier que la droiture, la sincérité, le vif sentiment de la justice, le pieux respect devant la sincérité des moeurs caractérisent les anciens peuples; tandis que nous voyons régner aujourd'hui le mensonge, la fasseté, la perfidie, l'esprit de chicane." Sorel's reference was simply: Hartman, Philosophie de l'inconscient, trad. Français. t. II, pp. 464-65. Quote appeared in "La moralité de la violence," p. 48. " . . . former ferocity tends to be replaced by ruse."

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 50. " . . . the Americans support, without too much complaint, the excesses of their politicians and financiers."

industrial system, Sorel concluded, had gradually created a new and extraordinary indulgence for all crimes of fraud in the great capitalist countries.⁵¹

Chiding the parliamentary politicians of capitalist democracy, Sorel pointed to their doctrine of social peace and the elimination of class conflict as theories which had not produced an ethic worthy of acknowledgement, and he purposed to consider proletarian violence as a counterforce to the established system. In order to suppress the tendencies against which morality struggled, Sorel believed, each consciousness must be dominated by a conviction of such power that action would precede the calculations of reflection. Religious ethics had claimed to possess this source of action, but Sorel complained "La masse des chrétiens ne suit pas la vraie morale chrétienne."⁵² And additionally, Sorel believed, theoretical Christianity had never been a

⁵¹Agreeing again with Hartmann, Sorel noted: "We are already approaching the time when theft and lying condemned by law will be despised as vulgar errors, as gross clumsiness, by the clever cheats who know how to preserve the letter of the law while infringing the rights of other people. For my part, I would rather live among the ancient Germans, at the risk of being killed on occasion, than be obliged, as I am in modern cities, to look upon every man as a swindler or a rogue unless I have evident proof of his honesty." Hartmann, Philosophie de l'inconscient, p. 465 quoted in "La moralité de la violence," p. 52.

⁵²Sorel, "La moralité de la violence," p. 72. "The mass of Christians do not follow true Christian morality."

religion suited to worldly people. He agreed with Renan who had observed that the monastery came into being so that the precepts of Jesus might be carried out somewhere, and Sorel characterized the lives of the great hermits as material struggles against "les puissances infernales" which pursued them everywhere. Lofty moral convictions, Sorel concluded, never depended on reasoning " . . . elles dépendent d'un état de guerre auquel les hommes acceptent de participer."⁵³ This observation was validated for Sorel by LePlay's discovery that in Protestant countries, the more vigorously the established church was assailed by dissident sects the greater the moral fervor was developed. Sorel concluded that conviction was founded on that competition in which each regarded itself as an army of truth fighting the armies of evil. Thus with respect to Socialism, Sorel agreed with Kautsky who believed that the ethics of the proletariat grew out of its revolutionary aspirations: "C'est l'idée de la révolution qui a relevé le prolétariat de l'abaissement."⁵⁴ In a country where the conception of the general strike existed, Sorel believed, the battles between workers and

⁵³ Ibid., p. 73. " . . . they depend on a state of war in which men accept to participate."

⁵⁴ Sorel's reference for the quote was incomplete: Kautsky, Le mouvement socialiste (October, 1902), p. 1891. "It is the idea of the revolution which has raised the proletariat from sinking."

representatives of the bourgeoisie could have far-reaching consequences. By adapting the spirit of Marx to conditions which were capable of assuming a revolutionary aspect, the general strike had become for Sorel, vital to Socialism.

In addition to the general strike, Sorel felt that contemporary Socialism in its Syndicalist form could be easily distinguished " . . . du socialisme officiel en reconnaissant la nécessité de perfectionner les mœurs."⁵⁵ According to Sorel, Syndicalism considered the moral progress of the proletariat to be a necessity of great importance. And because it desired to know this process of moral perfection, Sorel asserted, Syndicalism sought to know how to create in the present what he called the ethic of the producers of the future. To examine the qualities which would be required of these producers, Sorel noted the importance of analyzing the component parts of morality without falling under the influence of the false philosophers who " . . . ils s'imaginent . . . que leur devoir serait de tout ramener à l'unité."⁵⁶ On the contrary, Sorel believed in what

⁵⁵Sorel, "La moralité de la violence," p. 90. " . . . from official socialism in recognizing the necessity of perfecting morals." .

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 99. " . . . they imagine that their duty would be to bring everything into unity."

he called the "fundamental heterogeneity" of all civilized morality and he stated his conviction that ". . . the best way of understanding any group of ideas in the history of thought was to bring all the contradictions into sharp relief."⁵⁷

Sorel opened his analysis of morality by applying Nietzsche's identification of the values constructed by a superior class of warriors called masters to the master-type which Sorel believed existed in his day--this type, Sorel asserted, had created the extraordinary greatness of the United States. The Yankee was the master-type personified, and he quoted M. P. de Rousiers who wrote: "To become and remain an American one must look upon life as a struggle and not as a pleasure, and seek in it victorious effort, energetic and efficacious action, rather than pleasure."⁵⁸ Sorel forecast that this "Archaean type" of indomitable hero who was confident in his strength and who placed himself above rules would not disappear in the future. And many moral evils, he believed, would forever remain unremedied ". . . si

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Sorel's reference: De Rousier's: La vie américaine: l'éducation et la société, p. 325. See "La moralité de la violence," p. 103.

quelque personnage révolté ne forçait le peuple à rentrer en lui-même."⁵⁹

To the values created by the master-type, Sorel continued, Nietzsche opposed the system constructed by the sacerdotal castes and their ascetic ideal. But these ascetic values, Sorel believed, were transformed by forces alien to Christianity and Judaism. The family structure was responsible, he believed, for the production of ethical values such as respect for the human person, fidelity and devotion to the weak. Beyond these, Sorel classified under the general heading "civil relations" those values which he believed escaped Nietzsche's treatment. The civilization of Greek antiquity because it was based on slavery had influenced later generations to think of workers as children and passive instruments who did not need to think, and Sorel insisted that

" . . . le socialisme révolutionnaire serait impossible si le monde devait avoir une telle morale de faibles."⁶⁰

Thus for Sorel the task was to transform the workers of his day into future free producers who no longer labored under the rule of a class of masters.

⁵⁹Sorel, "La moralité de la violence," p. 103.
" . . . if some revolted person did not force the people to return into itself."

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 108. " . . . revolutionary socialism would be impossible if the world had had such a morality of weak people."

The conditions of the hoped for transformation of the workers, Sorel conceived as necessarily linked to the idea of the catastrophic battle in which each worker would imagine his role as vital: "Les batailles ne sauraient donc plus être assimilées à des jeux d'échec dans lesquels l'homme est comparable à un pion; elles deviennent des accumulations d'exploits héroïques, accomplis par des individus qui puisent dans leur propre enthousiasme les motifs de leur conduite."⁶¹ Like the soldiers in the Napoleonic wars, Sorel believed the workers would attach an almost superstitious importance to the execution of even the smallest task. This striving which would manifest itself, Sorel insisted, in spite of the absence of any personal immediate and proportionate reward, constituted for him " . . . la vertu secrète qui assure le progrès continu dans le monde."⁶² There was only one force, Sorel concluded, which could produce this enthusiasm, without which he felt morality would be impossible-- and that was the force resulting from propaganda in favor of a general strike.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 112. "The battles would thus no longer be assimilated in chess games in which man is comparable to a pawn; they become accumulations of heroic exploits, accomplished by individuals who draw from their own enthusiasm the motives of their conduct."

⁶²Ibid., p. 122. " . . . the secret virtue which assures continued progress in the world."

Les Illusions Du Progrès

In the August and September joint-issue of Le mouvement socialiste, 1906, Georges Sorel published a critique of the idea of progress entitled "Les illusions du progrès." Noting his agreement with Le Play who had commented on the degree to which people were more governed by the magical power of certain fashionable words than by ideas, Sorel advanced the hypothesis " . . . que l'idéologie moderne est toute pleine de confusion."⁶³ Sorel asserted that the thinking of his day was dominated by prejudices and dogma rather than by doctrines founded on the observation of facts. He attached a special significance to the idea of progress as being a conception which could most easily clarify a certain characteristic of what he called "la pensée bourgeoise." And in the spirit of Le Play Sorel purposed an examination of this concept which he insisted was " . . . une sorte de labyrinthe imaginé pour tromper les hommes simples et fournir aux sophistes des ressources infinies, leur permettant d'éviter toute discussion sérieuse."⁶⁴ Fearing that it was almost impossible to

⁶³ Georges Sorel, "Les illusions du progrès," Le mouvement socialiste (August-September, 1906), p. 290 (see note 1). Sorel's reference to Le Play was: Organisation du travail, 3rd edition, pp. 339, 340-42. " . . . modern ideology is full of confusion."

⁶⁴ Sorel, "Les illusions du progrès," p. 290. " . . . a sort of labyrinth imagined in order to fool simple men and furnish the sophists infinite resources, permitting them to avoid all serious discussion."

know the meaning of the idea of progress, Sorel concluded that only by describing the history of its development could such a confused concept be clarified. At the beginning of this historical analysis Sorel speculated that the doctrine of progress was not a discovery of modern science but an apology developed " . . . au hasard des circonstances."⁶⁵ And he saw in the study an opportunity to apply the historical conception of Marx with respect to the relationships which could be discovered between ideology and the conditions of existence of a particular class--in this instance the bourgeoisie.

Sorel noted that the origins of the doctrine of progress could be traced to what was essentially a literary quarrel over the relative superiority of the ancient or the then contemporary French writers--a debate which occurred during the last years of the seventeenth century. The figure of Nicolas Boileau, according to Sorel, represented " . . . l'esprit bourgeois s'opposant à l'esprit des salons et des ruelles."⁶⁶ French taste, Sorel believed, had remained faithful to Boileau's principles of good sense, clarity and natural language, which for Boileau had characterized ancient literature. When the

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 291. " . . . by the chance of circumstances." " . . . by the chance of circumstances."

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 294. " . . . the bourgeois spirit opposing the spirit of drawing rooms and lanes."



debate between the ancients and the moderns began, Boileau, who favored the ancients, was opposed, Sorel reported, by those who found his aesthetic " . . . trop gênante pour les médiocres."⁶⁷ The most numerous support took the side of the moderns and Sorel chided the role of "les jésuites" in the defeat of Boileau: " . . . les jésuites ont toujours soutenu le parti de la médiocrité, parce qu'ils étaient ainsi assurés d'avoir de leur côté le plus grand nombre des gens du monde; ils avaient défendu la médiocrité morale contre les jansenistes; ils défendirent la médiocrité littéraire contre Boileau."⁶⁸ By the end of the seventeenth century, Sorel noted, French society had abandoned itself to the search for happiness; fear of sin, the respect for chastity and pessimism, he believed, slowly disappeared while the moral force of Christianity faded. The origin of the doctrine of progress was born because society felt obliged to prove that it had the right to ignore the ancient maxims:

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 297. Sorel was astonished to see " . . . parmi les partisans des modernes un homme aussi savant que Bayle." Ibid. " . . . too disturbing for mediocre people."

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 299. He added scornfully " . . . et je crois bien que, de tout temps leur collèges ont été institués pour produire la médiocrité scientifique." Ibid., p. 2. " . . . the jesuits have always supported the mediocre party because they were thus assured of having the greatest number of people on their side; they defended moral mediocrity against the jansenists; they defended literary mediocrity against Boileau."

" . . . Fontenelle eut le mérite de révéler à ses contemporains la possibilité d'une telle philosophie."⁶⁹

Central to this theory of progress, Sorel believed, was the idea of the stability of the laws of nature, which he noted, Fontenelle popularized. But the idea of the stability of the laws of nature, Sorel asserted, could not be explained by seventeenth century physics, but was uniquely the result of historical conditions, the most important of which was the sense of the increasing stability and power of royal institutions in France. These institutions were regarded, Sorel wrote " . . . comme étant une force constante qui ajoutait chaque jour quelque nouvelle amélioration aux améliorations déjà acquises."⁷⁰ In addition, Sorel noted, the idea of progress was dependent upon two important ideas of Descartes which envisioned science as inseparable from practice, and as always increasing in scope. Fontenelle, whom Sorel labeled a skilled vulgarizer and "un cartésien fanatique" was able to exercise an influence on the movement of ideas which Sorel found to be " . . . en singulière contradiction avec sa médiocrité."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 305. "Fontenelle had the merit to reveal to his contemporaries the possibility of such a philosophy."

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 306. " . . . as being a constant force which added each day some new amelioration to the ameliorations already acquired."

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 308. " . . . the singular contradiction with his mediocrity."

Concerned with the reasons why Cartesianism could become a philosophy acceptable to those he called "gens du monde," Sorel speculated that this acceptance represented a remarkable example of the adoption of an ideology by a class which found in it formula capable of expressing its tendencies.⁷² And Sorel charged that by formulating his famous rule of methodical doubt Descartes only introduced into philosophy the habits of the aristocratic mind. A close look at the fundamental conceptions of Cartesianism, Sorel concluded, would demonstrate their perfect correspondance to the state of mind of the people of the time. Cartesianism, he believed, was resolutely optimistic, and thus pleased a society which wanted to amuse itself freely and which rejected the rigor of Jansenism. Additionally, Sorel continued, there was no Cartesian morality, and this was suitable to the time since moral standards had become less severe. To discover the truth, Sorel wrote, it sufficed for the Cartesian " . . . de se rendre attentif aux idées claires que chacun porte en lui."⁷³ Thus science became a manner of inventing nature

⁷²Sorel admitted that " . . . it was very rare that one could discover a solid line between a philosophical system and contemporary events, because the creator operated like an artist in interpreting sensations which he felt; but if the system lasted it found itself adapted to the needs of a particular society." Ibid., p. 309.

⁷³Ibid., p. 314. " . . . to render himself attentive to the clear ideas that each person carries in himself."

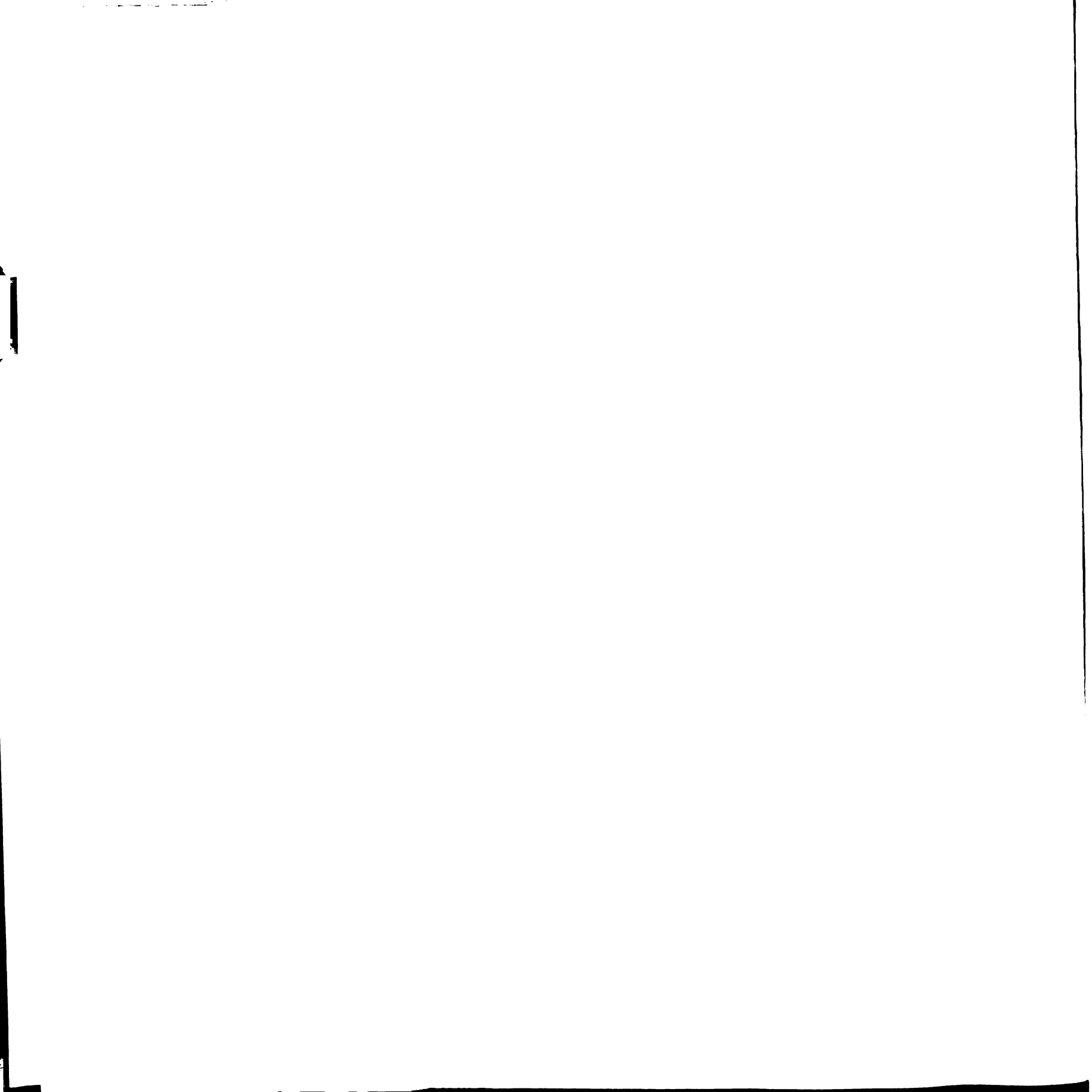
according to the method of Descartes and the history of humanity was seen as a pedagogical progression leading from the savage state to the aristocratic life. The eighteenth century, he concluded, accepted and extended this conception of inevitable progress.

La Classe Conquérante Au XVIII Siècle

To comprehend the ideas which were formed in eighteenth century France, Sorel added, writing in October, 1906, in an essay entitled "la classe conquérante au XVIII siècle," " . . . it must be understood that France was being slowly conquered by a 'oligarchie bourgeoise' which the monarchy had created for its service."⁷⁴ The ideology of eighteenth century France, he continued, was more and more related to the conditions of life of this class of auxiliaries to the monarchy. Its ideology, Sorel wrote: " . . . tend à prendre le caractère de consultations données par des juristes, des historiens ou des savants sur des problèmes qui leur sont soumis."⁷⁵ It was this historical development, Sorel affirmed, which created the habit in France of making all opinion depend on abstract formula, general theories and

⁷⁴ Georges Sorel, "La classe conquérante au XVIIIe siècle," Le mouvement socialiste (October, 1906), p. 65 (see note 1). (Hereinafter referred to as "La classe conquérante au XVIIIe Siècle.")

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 77. " . . . tends to take the character of consultations given by jurists, historians or scholars on problems submitted to them."



abstract philosophical doctrines. This new class which Sorel identified as the "Tiers-Etat," was economically based, he believed, upon merchants and manufacturers, a section of which had become involved with administrative and judicial functions and had assumed the character of a bourgeois oligarchy. This new oligarchy acted to regularize, reinforce and extend the power of the state, which, Sorel noted, it came more and more to regard as its property. But the Tiers-Etat, Sorel charged, came to feel the need to imitate the aristocracy: ". . . le Tiers-Etat n'est pas satisfait de la richesse et de la puissance, il lui faut des honneurs."⁷⁶ The important position which literary figures held in the eighteenth century, Sorel attributed to this seeking after honor. The Third-Estate, he wrote ". . . aspire au bel esprit et accorde une confiance absolue à des hommes qu'elle voit changés par la plus haute noblesse et par des souverains."⁷⁷

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 83. ". . . the Third-Estate is not satisfied with riches and power, it is necessary that they have honors."

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 99. Noting Voltair's experience in Berlin, and the extent to which he became "un très grand personnage" after his return to Paris, Sorel concluded, ". . . la haute société française était fort sensible aux jugements que l'étranger portait sur ses grands hommes et la bourgeoisie devait avoir pour eux un respect presque superstitieux," Ibid. ". . . aspires to the beautiful spirit and accords absolute confidence to men that it sees changed by the highest nobility and by sovereigns."

The doctrine of progress developed naturally out of the aspirations of this conquering class, Sorel insisted; but a comprehension of its thinking required an understanding of its idea of science. The narrow specialization of individual scientists which Sorel saw in his contemporary world, would have been regarded by the men of the eighteenth century as a degradation of the mind. Turgot regarded curiosity as the great force for progress, and this view, Sorel insisted: ". . . correspond parfaitement aux sentiments de ses contemporains qui sont toujours à la recherche de connaissances nouvelles et ne consentant jamais à s'enfermer dans les étroites frontières d'une spécialité scientifique."⁷⁸ From Diderot's Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature (1754) Sorel concluded that Diderot could not imagine a scientific culture which extended beyond that which was pleasing to amateurs. And Sorel found this curiosity, which characterized so much of eighteenth century thought, to be in perfect accord with the preoccupations of the bourgeois oligarchy. To be an excellent administrator, he wrote: ". . . il n'était nullement nécessaire

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 111. ". . . perfectly corresponded to the sentiments of his contemporaries who are always researching for new knowledge and never consent to enclose themselves in the narrow frontiers of a scientific specialty."

de posséder une connaissance de spécialiste."⁷⁹ In Condorcet, Sorel found an author who stated a goal which he believed was entirely directed by practicality. Condorcet had insisted that to render an evaluation of a discovery, an important theory, a new system of law or even a political revolution, it was necessary to determine its results with respect to the most numerous part of society. This idea, Sorel believed, characterized the Physiocrats as well as all other reformers of the eighteenth century; ". . . c'est là seulement qu'on peut juger du véritable perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine."⁸⁰

The administrative and utilitarian character of science in the eighteenth century, Sorel believed, explained the inability of what he called "l'occultisme" to become an important aspect of human knowledge. It could satisfy the curiosity of the salons, he admitted, ". . . mais il ne pouvait entrer dans les préoccupations

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 115-16. Noting the influence of the Encyclopædia, he wrote: "Pendant assez longtemps après la Révolution l'Encyclopédie semble avoir servi aux fonctionnaires pour prendre une vue générale des choses qu'ils devaient contrôler." Ibid., p. 116. ". . . it was not at all necessary to possess a specialized knowledge."

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 118. In a footnote Sorel added: "Il s'agit donc ici de statistique." ". . . it is only there that one can judge with true perfection the human species."

des hommes qui dirigeaient les grandes affaires."⁸¹ Had occultism exercised a great influence during this period, Sorel added, it would have been a remarkable example of an ideology deprived of any economic basis. The men of the eighteenth century, on the contrary, Sorel insisted, always placed themselves in the perspective of an oligarchy which sought to govern in the name of reason. The bourgeois oligarchy assumed that the citizens would allow their individual points of view to be directed toward conformity with those of enlightened administrators, and these administrators he noted were ". . . the first in history to be disposed to admit the extension of a mathematical calculus to political and moral problems."⁸²

L'Audace Novatrice Du Tiers-Etat

Continuing his attack on what he called "l'audace novatrice du tiers-Etat," Georges Sorel, writing in November, 1906, noted the rash audacity with which they approached problems of social reform.⁸³ Approvingly

⁸¹Ibid., p. 122. ". . . but it cannot enter in the preoccupations of men who direct big business."

⁸²Ibid., p. 129. Sorel complained of the same methodology among his contemporaries who were ". . . si dévotement à la sociologie."

⁸³Georges Sorel, "L'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," Le mouvement socialiste (November, 1906), p. 219 (see note 1). (Hereinafter referred to as "L'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat.")

quoting Tocqueville, he complained that this rising class believed that the total and sudden transformation of an old and complicated society could occur smoothly through the use of reason alone; a project which Sorel evaluated simply: "les malheureux!"⁸⁴ Turgot represented this movement toward what Sorel called recklessness (la témérité), a movement which he believed could not be distinguished from the rise of a bourgeois oligarchy which sensed that the hour of its dictatorship was near. The belief which supported the contention of this rising class that a radical change in institutions would be easy to effect, Sorel insisted, was rooted in their ideas on the nature of man. Turgot had stated the central idea in a letter to the king, in language which Sorel found similar to Rousseau: "Les droits des hommes ne sont point fondés sur leur histoire, mais sur leur nature."⁸⁵ Pointing to the eighteenth century authors who wrote on the physical organization of the human body, Sorel noted their acceptance of the idea of final causes upon which rested their

⁸⁴Sorel's reference was simply Tocqueville, L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution, p. 242 in "l'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," p. 220.

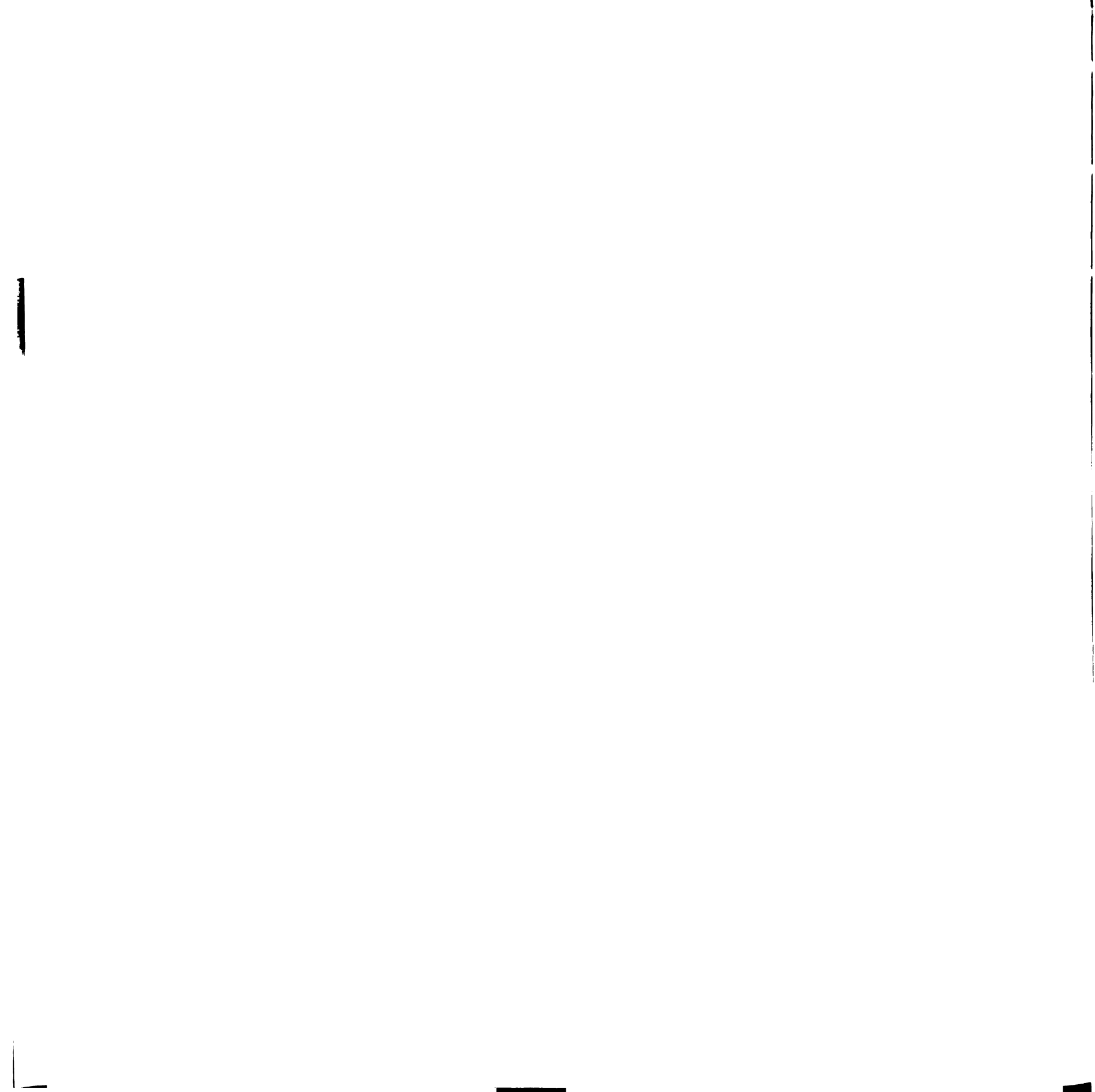
⁸⁵Sorel quoted Correspondance inédite de Condorcet et de Turgot, edited by M. Ch. Henry, p. 503, in "L'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," p. 228. "The rights of men are not founded on their history, but on their nature."

idea that the human organism demonstrated that nature had resolved in a perfect manner all the problems which could be posed.

The influence of Descartes according to Sorel contributed to the mood of confidence and the disdain for authority which became part of the ideology of the eighteenth century bourgeois oligarchy. Condorcet summed up this Cartesian influence, Sorel noted, citing a quote from Tableau historique: "Il (Descartes) dit aux hommes de secouer le joug de l'authorité, de ne plus reconnaître que celle qui serait avouée par la raison. . . ." ⁸⁶

In addition, Sorel continued, the eighteenth century philosophers believed that all the old social institutions depended upon the Christian church; and because they believed that these institutions were responsible for evil and error it seemed a simple and easy thing to transform them by destroying the Christian church. Taine was right, according to Sorel, when he wrote that "the

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 233. Sorel quoted Condorcet, Tableau historique (no page reference), and in a further footnote, Sorel quoted from the same source Condorcet's statement that Descartes had given " . . . la méthode de trouver de reconnaître la vérité." "He said to men to throw off the yoke of authority, to recognize only that which would be acknowledged by reason."



philosophy of the eighteenth century could be summed up in the maxim: 'Ecrasons l'Infâme.'"⁸⁷

But it was the Christian church, Sorel noted ironically, which had provided the philosophers with their ideas of the transformational power of education. The Christian missionaries had spoken of the extraordinary results which had been experienced among what they considered to be less advanced people and this had convinced the philosophers that the progress had been rapid " . . . parce que les Européens apporteraient à ces peuples le résultat de recherches qui ont été longues et fastidieuses."⁸⁸ Thus when Turgot became a royal minister, Sorel continued, he proposed a plan of popular education to the king, a plan which almost completely imitated, Sorel charged, the clerical approach to education. It was to be directed at forming virtuous and useful people in all classes of society. Turgot had written:

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 232. Sorel quoted from La conquête jacobine, Taine, p. 302. He also quoted Condorcet in a letter to Turgot: "Le colosse est à moitié détruit, mais il faut achever de l'écraser." Correspondance inédite de Condorcet et de Turgot, edited by M. Ch. Henry, pp. 205-06. "Crush the Infamous."

⁸⁸ Sorel, "L'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," p. 234. " . . . because the Europeans would bring to these people the result of long and fastidious research."

L'éducation civique que ferait donner le conseil de l'Instruction, les livres raisonnables qu'il ferait rédiger et qu'il obligerait tous les professeurs d'enseigner contribueraient à former un peuple instruit et vertueux. Ils sèmeraient dans le coeur des enfants des principes d'humanité, de justice, de bienfaisance et d'amour pour l'Etat, qui, trouvant leur application à mesure qu'ils avanceraient en âge, s'accroîtraient sans cesse.⁸⁹

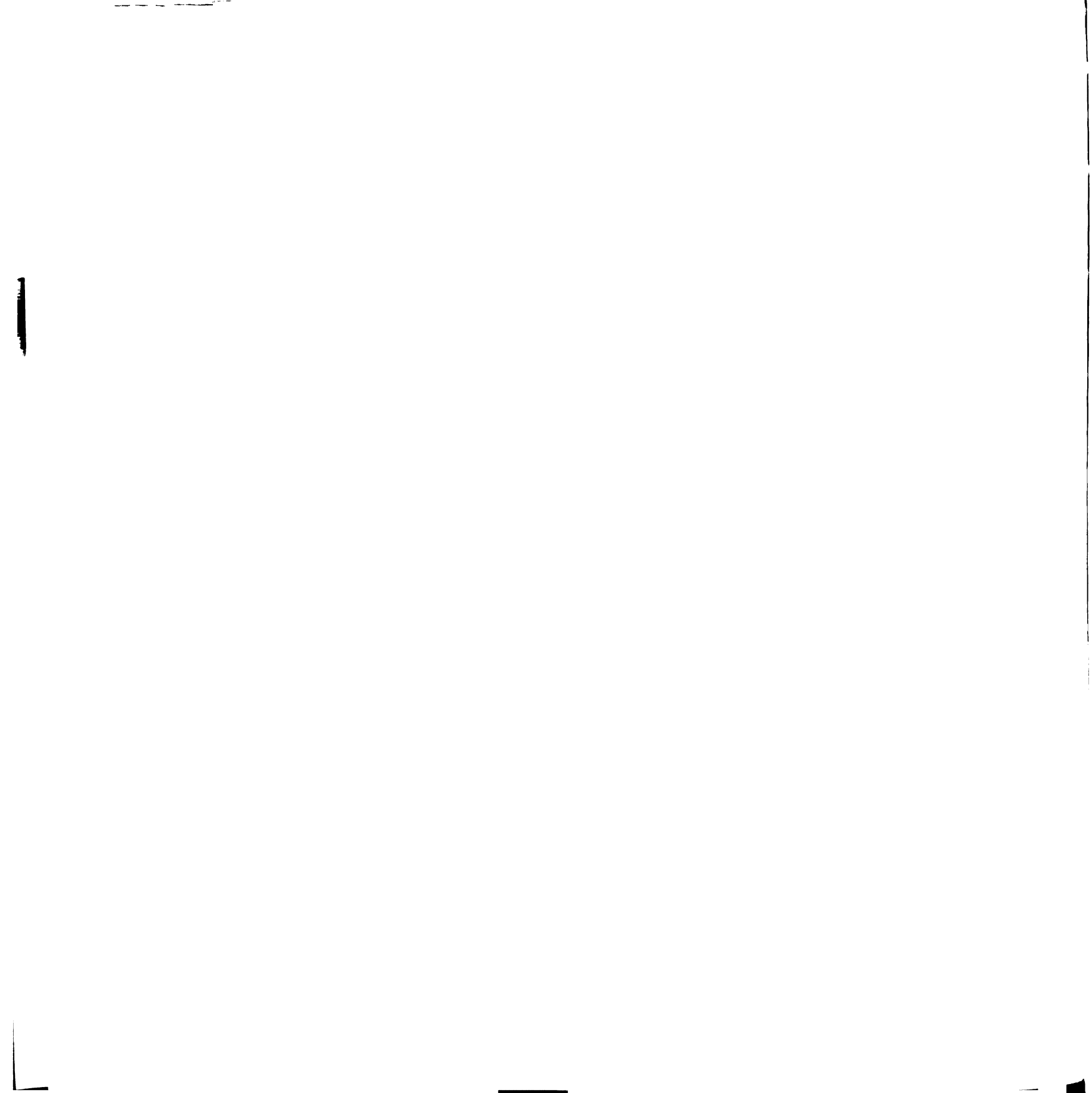
"These philosophers of France, Sorel noted caustically, lacked the experience of the present which might have taught them that such an education would only effectively facilitate the dominion of charlatans."⁹⁰

Turning to economic influences in the eighteenth century, Sorel noted that although the century had begun poorly by the 1750's there was a decided economic improvement associated with agriculture and commerce. Although all classes did not share equally in this economic improvement, Sorel believed the bourgeoisie was greatly influenced by its rapid economic rise.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 235. Sorel quoted Correspondance inédite de Condorcet et de Turgot, p. 549. In an aside Sorel noted that Democracy in his day " . . . a conservé toutes ces opinions de l'oligarchie du Tiers-Etat; elle a conçu, elle aussi, l'instruction primaire comme un moyen d'enseigner un catéchisme laïque, patriotique bourgeois," p. 236.

Civic education that would make the counselor of Instruction give reasonable books, would contribute to form an instructed and virtuous people. They would plant principles of humanity, justice, charity and love for state in the hearts of children, who finding their application in proportion as they advance in age, would grow without ceasing.

⁹⁰Sorel, "L'audace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," p. 236.



Tocqueville, according to Sorel, observed that by 1780

Personne ne prétend plus que la France est en décadence; on dirait au contraire qu'il n'y a en ce moment plus de bornes a ses progrès. C'est alors que la doctrine de la perfectibilité continue et indéfinie de l'homme prend naissance. Vingt ans auparavant on n'espérait rien de l'avenir; maintenant on ne redoute rien.⁹¹

With respect to this theory of limitless progress, Sorel noted: "Comme toujours il se trouve des idéologues pour continuer à penser d'après les conditions antérieures."⁹² Nevertheless, he concluded, the great rapidity of the economic amelioration had the effect of producing the belief in the eighteenth century that everything was possible.

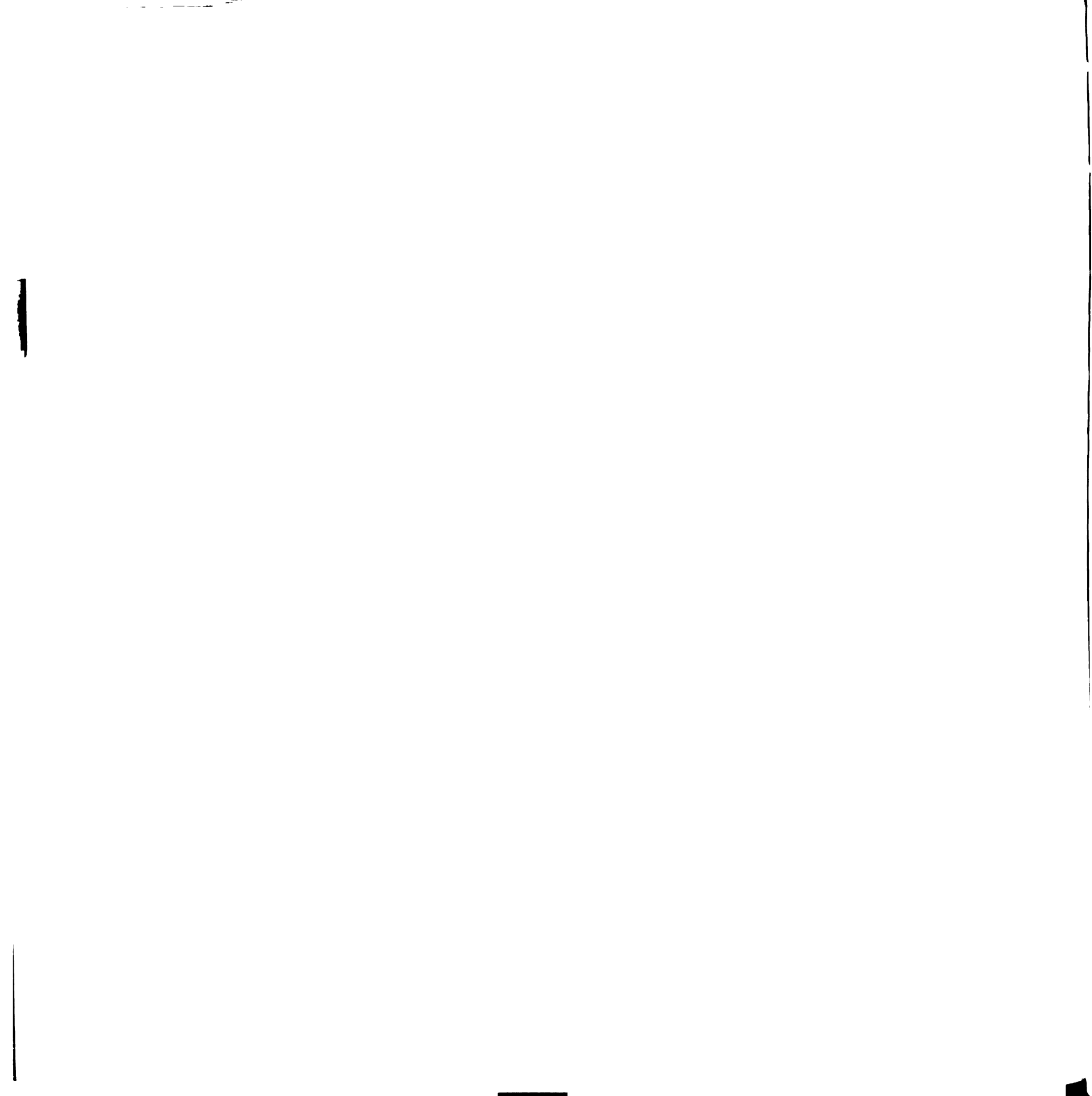
Les Théories Modernes Du Progrès

Continuing into the period of the early nineteenth century, Sorel, in an essay entitled "Les théories modernes du progrès," examined the ideas of Mme. de Staël, whom he believed had attempted to establish the

⁹¹Ibid., p. 245. Sorel quoted Tocqueville, L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution, p. 292.

No one pretends any longer that France is in decadence; one would say on the contrary that there is at this moment no more limits to its progress. It is thus that the doctrine of continued and indefinite perfectability of man takes birth. Twenty years before we hoped for nothing from the future now we fear nothing.

⁹²Sorel, "L'andace novatrice du Tiers-Etat," p. 245. "As always it finds ideologists in order to continue to think according to anterior conditions."



superiority of her epoch through literary considerations.⁹³

The new literary criticism of Mme. de Staël, Sorel believed was motivated by her desire to prove that a specifically republican literature was possible under the condition that it liberate itself from the rules of ancient classical literature. Sorel concluded that Mme. de Stael must be understood in the context of her desire to defend the work of the French Revolution and he added: "Toutes les thèses nouvelles de ce livre fameux sont ainsi déterminées par les conditions historiques."⁹⁴

The post-revolutionary developments in the realm of historiography as represented in the first instance by Savigny were according to Sorel, weakened conceptually because of a desire to maintain an assumption of future progress. Unlike Mme. de Staël who sought to defend the present over the past, Sorel wrote: ". . . les thèses de l'école historique . . . a voulu conserver l'espérance d'un mouvement futur, ce qui obligeait à introduire une force créatrice, une puissance de progrès."⁹⁵ But this

⁹³ Georges Sorel, "Les théories modernes du progrès, Le mouvement socialiste (December, 1906), (see note 1). (Hereinafter referred to as "Les théories modernes du progrès.")

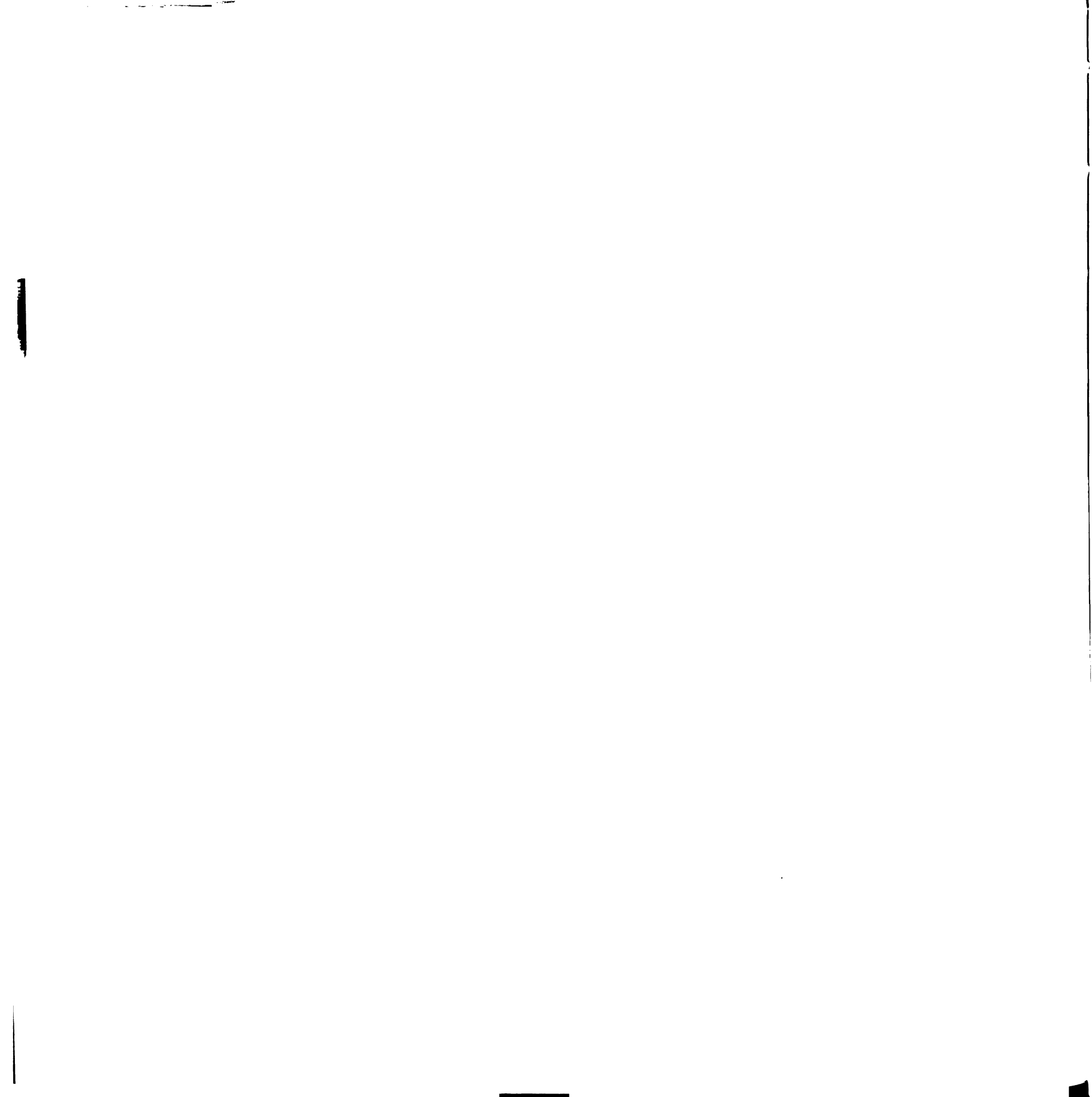
⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 330. "All the new theses of this famous book are thus determined by historical conditions."

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 333. Sorel complained that the school did not ". . . tenue rigoureusement à cette étude scientifique d'un passé achevé, délimité, solidifié. ". . . the theses of the historical school wished to conserve the hope of a future movement which obliged to introduce a creative force, a power of progress."

creative force, Sorel charged, was not itself subject to any formulation and to this extent the historical school, he continued, was similar to the Darwinian school of evolution " . . . qui ne peut pas dire quelles sont les causes qui déterminent les changements dans les espèces; elle constate seulement, une fois la sélection achevée."⁹⁶ During the years after the restoration of the French monarchy in the early nineteenth century, Sorel observed, the doctrine of progress could maintain itself only by borrowing heavily from that of evolution. Henceforth, this organic conception engendered several important theses. A special importance was attached to the slowness and regularity of historical movement; and the idea of necessity was strongly reinforced. Institutions themselves came to be regarded as if they were organs of a living being.

Sorel found Tocqueville's Démocratie en Amérique (1834) a remarkable application of these new points of view. Tocqueville, according to Sorel, regarded the movement toward equality of conditions as a world-wide phenomenon in which all people " . . . ont été poussés pêle-mêle dans la même voie et tous ont travaillé en

⁹⁶Ibid. Sorel added " . . . on dit que la concurrence vital donne la victoire aux plus aptes; mais quels sont les plus aptes?" " . . . which cannot say what are the causes that determine changes in the species; it only verifies once the selection is finished."



commun, les uns malgré eux, les autres à leur issue, aveugles instruments dans la main de Dieu."⁹⁷ The movement, Sorel observed, was represented by Tocqueville as organic and irresistible; democracy was presented as the necessity of the future. And the work of Proudhon which appeared prior to 1848, Sorel noted, was highly influenced by these ideas of Tocqueville--especially Proudhon's Contradictions économiques which Sorel called " . . . une philosophie du devenir égalitaire démontrée par les lois économique."⁹⁸ But Sorel agreed with Marx who rejected this position, and sustained that this tendency toward equality appeared only in the present.⁹⁹ The defenders of the ideas of equality, Sorel speculated, justified these ideas to affirm a desired future. They wanted to make it known that equality was not an accident of modern times: "C'est la point de vue de la création

⁹⁷Quoted by Sorel from Tocqueville, Democratie en Amérique, no page number cited only " . . . aux premières pages de son livre, la première édition en 1834." " . . . have been pushed pell-mell in the same path and have all worked in common, the ones despite the others, the others at their conclusion blind instruments in the hand of God."

⁹⁸Sorel, "Les théories modernes du progrès," p. 337. " . . . a philosophy of becoming egalitarian demonstrated by economic laws."

⁹⁹Sorel referred here to Marx, Misère de la philosophie, p. 165.

qui gâtait leurs vues sur le passé; l'étude de l'évolution était troublée par une idée préconçue sur l'avenir."¹⁰⁰

As democracy came to feel assured of its future, Sorel continued, it no longer felt the need to justify its right to power through philosophy of history because it reposed on a very solid hierarchy. The former champions of the idea of the necessity of the state had built the modern state, Sorel charged, on the basis of ideas which pertained to "l'héritage de l'ancien régime."¹⁰¹ Sorel concluded his study of the idea of progress by identifying the immediate task of contemporary Socialism, which was he wrote: " . . . de démolir tout cet échafaudage de

¹⁰⁰Sorel, "Les théories modernes du progrès," p. 339. Sorel admired Proudhon's definitions in his book entitled Justice where Proudhon stated that there were both epochs of regression and progress, whose alternation was closely related to the morality of each epoch. Progress occurred, according to Proudhon " . . . lorsque . . . la justification ou le perfectionnement de l'humanité par elle-même, lorsque la liberté et la justice s'accroissent, que l'homme si'élève au-dessus de ce qu'il y a de fatal; la décadence est la corruption ou la dissolution de l'humanité par elle-même, manifestée par la perte successive des moeurs, de la liberté, du génie, par la diminution du courage, de la foi, l'appauvrissement des races." Proudhon, De la justice dans la Revolution et dans l'Eglise, t. III, p. 271. "It is the point of view of creation which spoils their views on the past; the study of evolution was troubled by a preconceived idea of the future."

¹⁰¹Sorel, "Les théories modernes du progrès," p. 345. " . . . heritage of the former regime."

mensonges conventionnels et de ruiner le prestige dont jouit encore la métaphysique des gens qui vulgarisent la vulgarisation du XVIII^e siècle."¹⁰²

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau remained for Sorel a provocative and intriguing figure. In response to a study entitled Jean-Jacques Rousseau by Jules Lemaître (Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1907), Georges Sorel prepared and published a rebuttal which appeared in June, 1907, in Le mouvement socialiste. Sorel complained that Lemaître had based most of his analysis on the psychology of Rousseau, an approach which he labeled " . . . l'ordinaire salut des auteurs embarrassés, dépourvus d'idées, mais désireux de paraître profonds."¹⁰³ The place which Rousseau occupied in the history of French literature was enormously important, Sorel believed; but the source of his unexcelled lyricism was, he insisted, quite different from that which Lemaître had identified. While admitting with Lemaître that "son tempérament, son état physique" played a part in the

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 346. " . . . to demolish this entire edifice of conventional lies and to ruin the prestige that is still enjoyed by the metaphysics of the people who vulgarize the vulgarization of the eighteenth century."

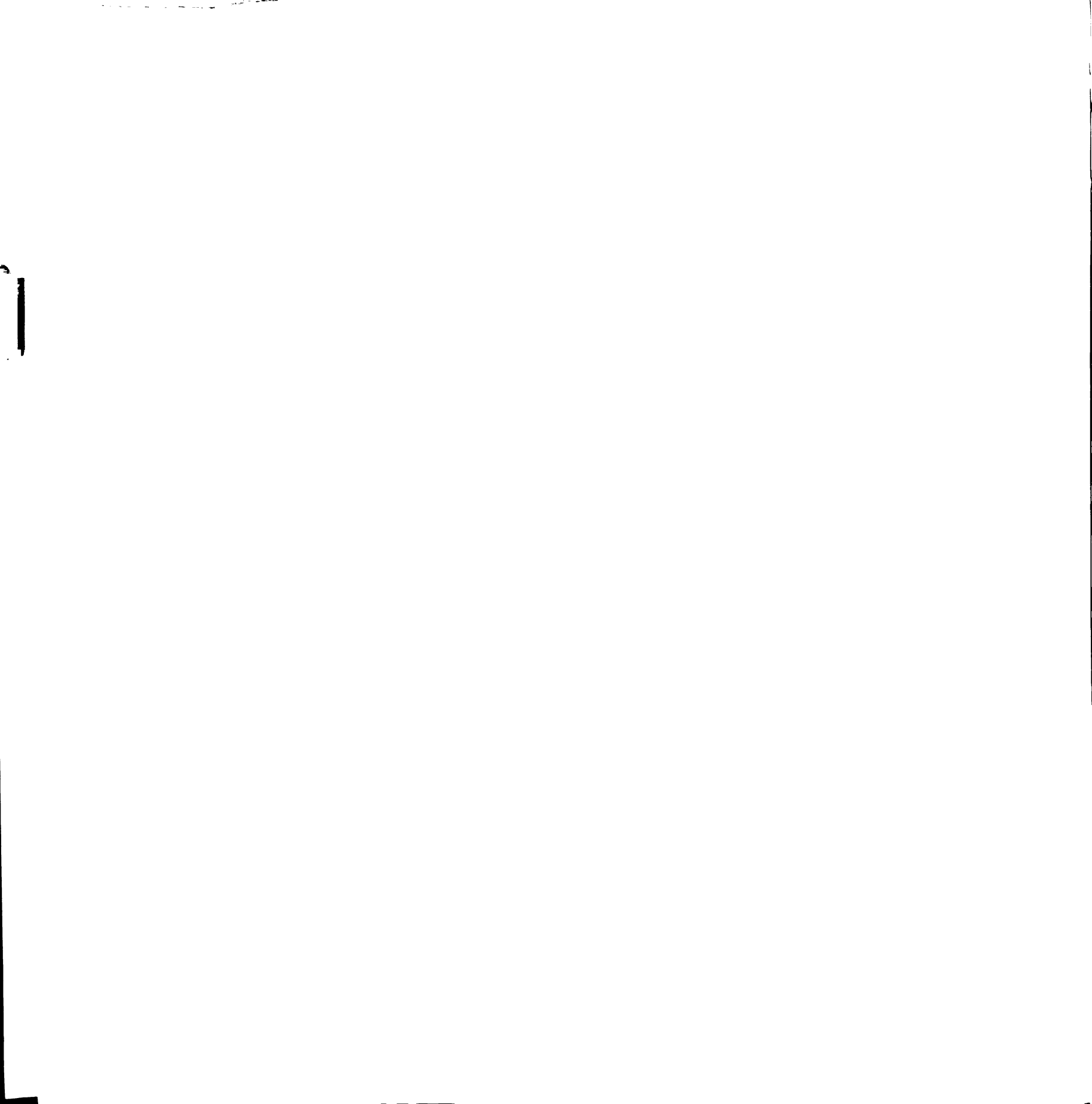
¹⁰³ Georges Sorel, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," Le mouvement socialiste (June, 1907), p. 509. (Hereinafter referred to as "Jean-Jacques Rousseau.") " . . . the ordinary salvation of embarrassed authors, devoid of ideas but desirous of appearing profound."

quality of Rousseau's lyricism, Sorel charged that
 " . . . Lemaître oublie cependant l'essentiel, la raison
 d'art qui domine la formation de ces solutions: Rousseau
 cherchait à dire ce qui lui paraissait le mieux convenir
 à son talent."¹⁰⁴ This talent, according to Sorel, made
 Rousseau the most powerful orator in the French language
 since Bossuet. But unlike Bossuet, Sorel insisted,
 Rousseau often replaced reason with eloquence " . . .
 ce n'est pas la science qui détermine la thèse à
 développer mais l'art."¹⁰⁵

Sorel saw in Rousseau a romanticism which he
 believed had a very limited preoccupation with reality.
 But the post-revolutionary romantic movement, Sorel
 believed, was not the responsibility of Rousseau because
 it did not immediately succeed him. The intervening
 revolution and its historical impact, Sorel believed,
 served to definitively separate Rousseau from the later
 romanticism and he concluded that the role of Rousseau

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 518. Sorel noted the historical
 paradox which Rousseau presented: " . . . mais le XVIII^e
 siècle, si complètement intellectualisé, était rebelle
 avec une telle renaissance; l'exemple de Rousseau nous
 montre qu'un ricorso littéraire peut se produire pour un
 être isolé et c'est là une expérience fort remarquable,"
 p. 517. "M. Lemaître, however, forgot the essential,
 the reason of art which dominates the formation of these
 solutions: Rousseau sought to say that which seemed to
 him the most convenient to his talent."

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 518. "It is not science that deter-
 mines the thésis to develop but art."



was to leave the masterpieces which broke with the traditions of the XVIII century. The later romanticism, Sorel added, was characterized by a Christian renaissance quite distinct from the position of Rousseau who " . . . n'admettait pas que les miracles évangéliques soient certains, ni surtout qu'ils soient des preuves."¹⁰⁶

Rousseau represented to Sorel a thinker without a comprehensive system, who borrowed his ideas from those which were in general circulation. His conception of property as the source of all unhappiness, Sorel noted, was very old and well known having derived from Plato's Republic and from the Renaissance humanists. Nevertheless, by making a choice among shared opinions and by giving them authority, Sorel believed Rousseau had given them a new historical importance. And he speculated that " . . . le rôle du grand homme est presque toujours de mettre de nouvelles notes sur d'anciennes valeurs."¹⁰⁷ To the widespread literature on newly developing people, Sorel attributed the influence for Rousseau's ideas on liberty, property, and the happiness of people living according to nature. Sorel criticized Lemaître who he believed had intended to demonstrate the evil consequences

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 522. " . . . did not admit that evangelical miracles are certain, nor, especially, that they are proof."

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 524. " . . . the role of a great man is nearly always to put new notes on old values."

of the ideas of Rousseau through such expedients as insisting that the Terror was the result of the Social Contract. This thesis was rejected by Sorel who observed that the entire history of the French Revolution was in contradiction with a fundamental thesis of the Social Contract: " . . . cette histoire est dominée par les luttes entreprises par les jacobins . . . et Rousseau avait écrit: Il n'y a plus de volonté générale quand une des associations partielles est si grande qu'elle l'emporte sur toutes les autres."¹⁰⁸

Sorel speculated that one reason the work of Rousseau was so little understood by the revolutionaries was because of the style in which it was written: " . . . c'est qu'elle est, pour la plus grande partie, dans la tradition de l'éloquence sacrée et que ce genre comporte de grandes exagérations."¹⁰⁹ Rousseau wanted, Sorel affirmed, in the tradition of religious oratory (oratories

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 528. Sorel gave no citation for his quote from the Social Contract; Sorel noted that only a complete misunderstanding of Rousseau could lead to an interpretation which would justify the reign of terror; and he noted additionally: "Nous avons vu, de nos jours, l'oeuvre de Marx donner naissance à des commentaires aussi ineptes que ceux qu'on fit alors de l'oeuvre de Rousseau." " . . . this history is dominated by struggles undertaken by the Jacobins . . . and Rousseau wrote: 'there is no more general will when one of the partial associations is so big that it carries its will on all the others.'"

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 529. " . . . it is that it is, for the most part, in the tradition of sacred eloquence and that this genre carries great exaggerations."

des prédicateurs catholiques), to produce in his contemporaries an emotion capable of engendering " . . . des réflexions utiles, mais indéterminées, au sujet de leur manière de vivre."¹¹⁰ Thus Rousseau, Sorel continued, presented strongly colored images " . . . qu'il faut prendre en bloc comme des masses indivisibles et non considérer comme des modèles proposés à l'empirisme qui en tirera ce qu'il pourra."¹¹¹ Rousseau himself, Sorel insisted, had warned against the absurdities which would be produced by mixing Emile and the Social Contract into the life of the century, and yet this is what the revolutionaries attempted, Sorel charged, and to this extent they failed to comprehend the work of Rousseau. This error, Sorel concluded, was exactly like those committed by numerous heretical sects of the Middle Ages who wanted to put into practice the thesis on poverty which they had found in the fathers of the Christian church. Thus Sorel concluded that "Le spectacle de Robespierre relisant constamment le Nouvelle Héloïse, pour se tenir

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 531. " . . . useful but undetermined reflections, on the subject of their manner of living."

¹¹¹Ibid. " . . . that it is necessary to take in a block, as indivisible masses and not considered like models proposed to empiricism which will pull from it what it can."

au niveau de l'éloquence émue, me semble être un des plus burlesques de l'histoire."¹¹²

La Crise Morale Et Religieuse

In July, 1907, Georges Sorel wrote an essay entitled "la crise morale et religieuse" in which he quoted from Rousseau's Confessions to illustrate a contemporary religious paradox. In the sixth book of the Confessions, Sorel noted the appearance of Madame de Warens whom, he noted, remained totally faithful to her religious beliefs even when an examination of the articles of that faith revealed her beliefs to be in opposition to those of her church. Her response particularly interested Sorel: "I am a good Catholic, she said, and I always want to be. I am not the mistress of my faith, but I am of my will. I submit without reservation, and I want to believe everything."¹¹³ Sorel believed that the religious basis of morality as exemplified by Madame de Warens was losing its force in the modern world, and this crisis for morality was aggravated, he contended,

¹¹²Ibid. Sorel's reference for this image was cited as Chuquet, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p. 196. "The spectacle of Robespierre constantly rereading the New Heloise, in order to hold himself at the level of affected eloquence, seems to me to be one of the most burlesque of history."

¹¹³Georges Sorel, "La Crise morale et religieuse," Le mouvement socialiste (July, 1907). Sorel's reference to Rousseau's Confessions is not documented.

because contemporary bourgeois institutions were powerless to provide an alternative: "Tout le monde sent, d'une manière plus ou moins précise, qu'on ne peut fonder la morale sur l'Etat, sur le droit, sur l'économie et, par suite sur aucune des institutions bourgeoises."¹¹⁴

Morality, he believed, required " . . . quelque chose de mystérieux, ou tout au moins d'étranger aux institutions de notre société."¹¹⁵ The question for Sorel had become where to find what he called "ce quelque chose"?

Sorel was convinced that the bourgeoisie was destined to live without morality. In the contemporary bourgeoisie, Sorel noted, there was only a preoccupation with immediate interests: " . . . elle se contente d'un arbitraire mitigé par des considérations d'opportunité."¹¹⁶ This condition would not, Sorel believed, lead to the immediate fall of the bourgeoisie which he forecast would be able to find resources to defend itself for a very

¹¹⁴Sorel, "La Crise morale et religieuse," p. 27. "Everyone feels, in a more or less precise manner, that we cannot found morality on the state, on law, on economy and consequently on any bourgeois institution."

¹¹⁵Ibid. " . . . something mysterious or at least strange to the institutions of our society."

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 35. " . . . it contents itself with an arbitrariness mitigated by considerations of opportunity."

long time against the revolutionary proletariat. A society, Sorel observed, could prosper materially without possessing moral values, and he advanced the speculation that morality was more independent of the economic system than were judicial, political and religious ideologies. He further believed that a class could create for itself " . . . des conceptions morales qui soient en complet désaccord avec tout l'ensemble de la structure sociale."¹¹⁷ This possibility, he affirmed, was one of the postulates of Socialism founded on the basis of class conflict. Thus he believed it was important to disallow the moral teachings of bourgeois philosophy from penetrating the proletariat because its philosophers would be necessarily led " . . . à inventer des ombres de morale sophistique, qui sont de nature à porter le trouble dans les âmes et à conduire le peuple à la corruption."¹¹⁸

L'Evolution Créatrice

In April, 1908, Georges Sorel completed the fifth in a series of essays devoted to the analysis and evaluation of the theories advanced by Henri Bergson in his

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36. " . . . moral conceptions which are in complete disaccord with the entire social structure."

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 37. " . . . to invent shadows of moral sophistry, which naturally carry trouble in souls and to lead the people to corruption."

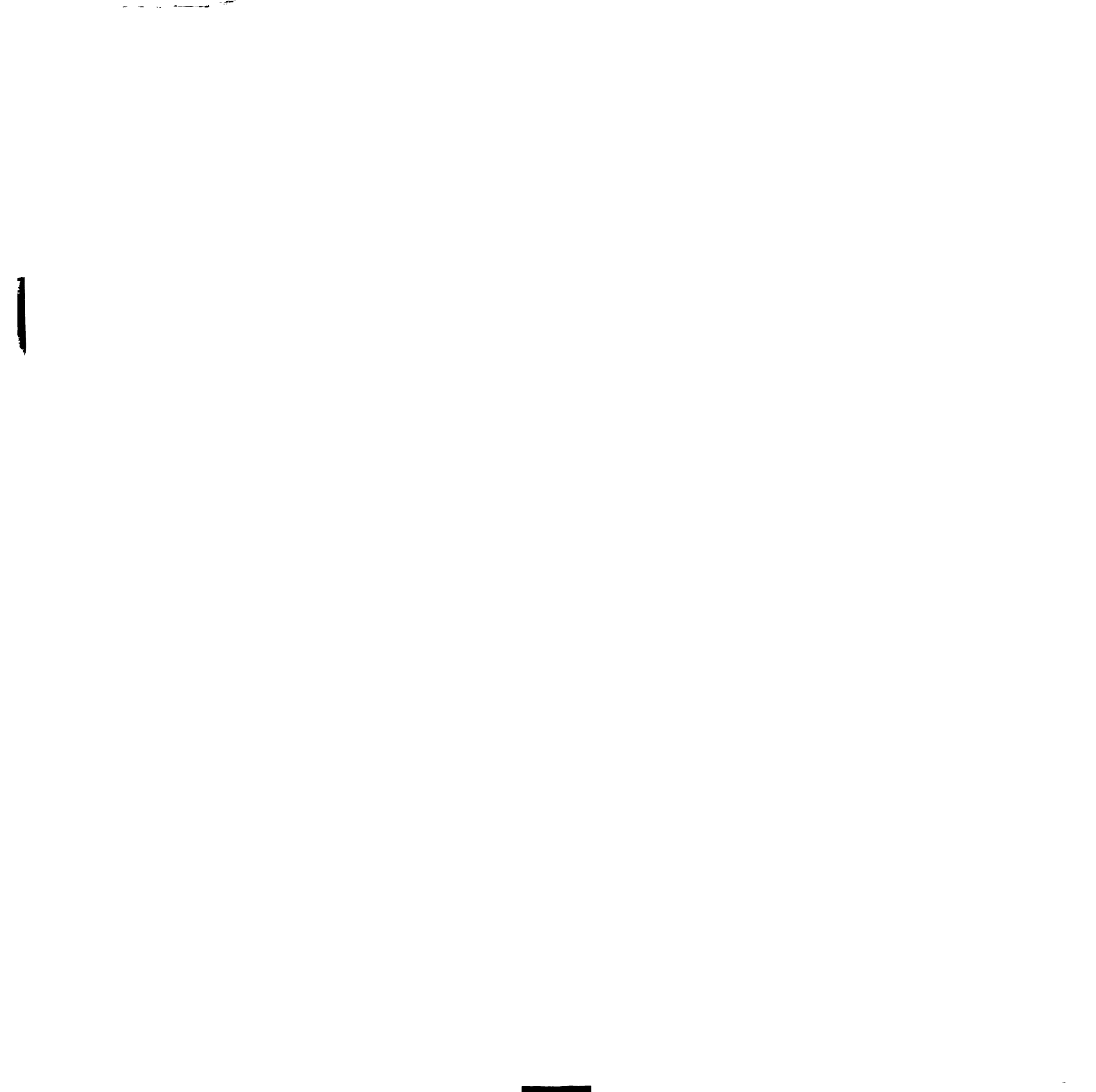
book entitled L'Evolution créatrice.¹¹⁹ Sorel expressed the hope that the ideas developed by Bergson would not be confined to the natural sciences where he believed their application had little value, instead he affirmed the great value which the insights of Bergson would have for understanding " . . . les grands mouvements sociaux qui requièrent une grande liberté."¹²⁰

Bergson had, according to Sorel, identified the raison d'être of metaphysics as intuition which Bergson conceived as a sort of revelation " . . . sur notre personnalité, sur notre liberté, sur la place que nous occupons dans l'ensemble de la nature, sur notre origin et peut-être aussi sur notre destinée."¹²¹ This intuition was properly understood from the perspective of the work

¹¹⁹ Georges Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," Le mouvement socialiste (April, 1908). (See Appendix B for a complete list of Georges Sorel's contributions to Le mouvement socialiste in the years 1907 and 1908.) This concluding essay will hereinafter be referred to as: "L'Evolution créatrice," April, 1908; others in the series will be designated in a similar fashion, distinguished by the appropriate date of appearance in Le mouvement socialiste.

¹²⁰ Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," April, 1908, p. 294. " . . . the great social movements which demand great liberty."

¹²¹ Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," January, 1908, p. 49. Sorel's reference is to L'Evolution créatrice, Henri Bergson, pp. 290, 291. " . . . of our personality, liberty, of the place we occupy in nature, on our origin and perhaps, also, on our destiny."



of an artist who created by an invention which was uniquely personal. Intuition was, Sorel believed, a form of invention; and he accepted Bergson's observation: "C'est une lampe presque éteinte, qui ne se ranime que de loin en loin, pour quelques instants à peine."¹²² Inventions played a role even in the development of modern physics, Sorel noted, because each invention enlarged human horizons, but this progress was paradoxical, because it had revealed " . . . un trou noir toujours plus vaste qui se manifeste à nos yeux."¹²³ Sorel speculated that in all fields the inventors were poets and he praised the immense services which the poetic imagination of certain savants had rendered. And because he believed that the poetic faculties played a preponderant role in the sciences, he questioned the wisdom of what he called "nos méthodes pédagogique" which he charged had tended to ruin "toute faculté poétique" in the students of his day.¹²⁴ The capacity for criticism as well as for invention had been stifled, Sorel believed, because of

¹²²Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," January, 1908, p. 50, and L'Evolution créatrice, Bergson, p. 298. "It is a nearly extinguished lamp, which only revives itself at long intervals, for scarcely a few seconds."

¹²³Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," January, 1908, p. 51. " . . . a black hole always more vast which shows itself to our eyes."

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 52.

a false and exaggerated confidence which students had been taught to feel when presented with ideas which appeared too simple and obvious to be worthy of a profound examination. Bergson had found, according to Sorel, that in philosophy this condition was due to an illusion of language.

In terminating his study of Bergson, Sorel attempted to distinguish between two modes of representation. On the one hand, he identified the pursuit of what he called " . . . une connaissance impersonnelle, scientifique, destinée à des applications déterministes;"¹²⁵ which he believed corresponded to Kant's designation of phenomena in that it represented an area of scientific investigation in the context of time and mathematics. The second mode of representation was that in which " . . . nous construisons une connaissance personnelle, poétique, faite en vue d'actes libres;"¹²⁶ which corresponded to Kant's designation of noumenon which was outside of time and was, Sorel added, the realm of moral philosophy.

The procedure which was employed for the purpose of exercising personal freedom, Sorel affirmed, required

¹²⁵Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice," April, 1908, p. 286. " . . . an impersonal, scientific knowledge destined to determinist applications."

¹²⁶Ibid. " . . . we construct a personal, poetic knowledge made in view of free acts."

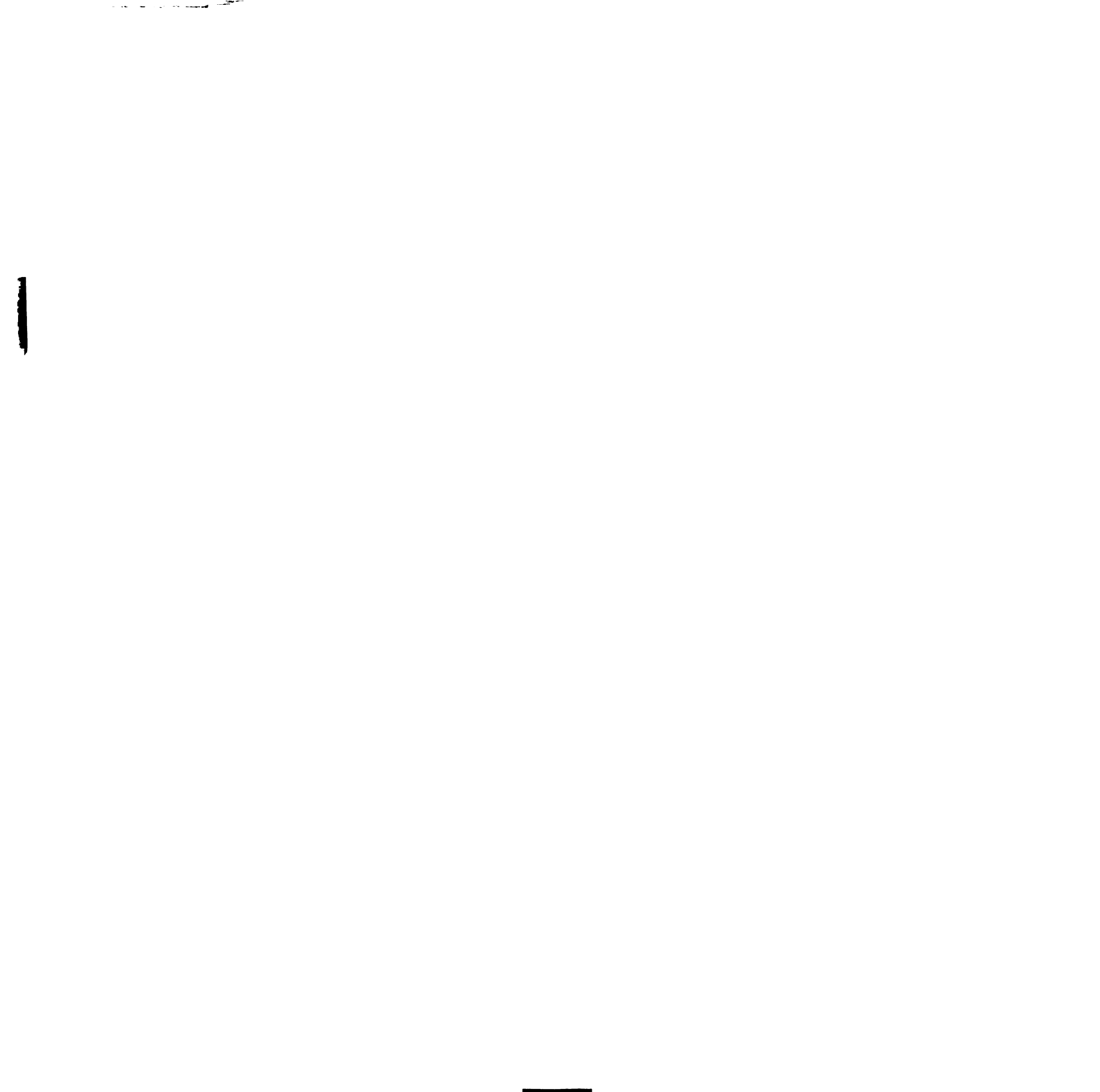
the creation of an imaginary world projected into the future; it was he continued " . . . formé de mouvements qui dépendent de notre psychologie profonde; nous nous sentons mêlés, d'une manière active, à cette agitation, et cependant on peut dire que ce monde est à nous et qu'il est entièrement contenu dans notre âme."¹²⁷ These constructions which served to initiate free acts, Sorel believed, were representations which appeared "en bloc" and were constructed according to " . . . le désir de notre âme."¹²⁸ Contrary to an atomistic science which regarded the whole as the sum of its parts, Sorel insisted, here only the whole matters " . . . parce qu'il est l'intention de notre conscience créatrice et que les parties ne sont que des manifestations accessoires de cette conscience, produits qui sont changés, avec la plus grande facilité quand ils ne paraissent plus

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 287. In a footnote, Sorel added "This world is placed in a future which has no determined date or chronology; such a world could be thus regarded as being outside of time and this corresponds well to Kant's noumenon." " . . . formed from movements which depend on our profound psychology; we feel mingled, in an active manner, with this agitation, and we can say, however, this world is ours and it is entirely contained in our soul."

¹²⁸Ibid. "There was unity in these constructions, Sorel added . . . parce qu'en dernière analyse, c'est nous-mêmes qui sommes en jeu dans ce tableau." " . . . the desire of our soul."

répondre suffisamment à nos intentions."¹²⁹ The critic, Sorel concluded, can refute a representation of the scientific order, but is powerless before a construction which was imagined for the purpose of free action.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 288. " . . . because it is the intention of our creative conscience and that parts are only accessory manifestations of this conscience--products which are changed with the greatest ease when they no longer appear to sufficiently answer our intentions."



APPENDIX A

LE MOUVEMENT SOCIALISTE: 1906
CONTRIBUTIONS BY GEORGES SOREL

- 15 janvier 1906
"Réflexions sur la Violence," pp. 5-56.*
- 15 février 1906
"les Préjugés contre la violence," pp. 140-64.*
"les déclin du parti socialiste international"
pp. 194-202.
- 15 mars 1906
"La Grève Générale prolétarienne," pp. 256-93.*
- 15 avril 1906
"La Grève Générale politique," pp. 390-427.*
Revue critique:
les Droits Acquis, de Lassalle, pp. 476-85.
- 15 mai et 15 juin 1906
"La moralité de la violence-La morale des producteurs,"
pp. 33-124.*
- juillet 1906
Revue critique:
Grandeur et décadence de Rome par Guglielmo Ferrero
pp. 244-68.
- août et septembre 1906
"Les Illusions du progrès," pp. 289-328.
- octobre 1906
"Les Illusions du progrès," pp. 65-129.
- novembre 1906
"Les Illusions du progrès," pp. 219-50.
Revue critique:
Le caractère religieux de socialisme, par Edouard
Dolléans, pp. 283-90.
- decembre 1906
"Les théories modernes du progrès," pp. 314-46.

* These essays were combined to form the influential book Reflections on Violence, 1st edition published in French Reflexions sur la Violence, Rivière, Paris, 1908.

APPENDIX B

LE MOUVEMENT SOCIALISTE 1907 - 1908
CONTRIBUTIONS BY GEORGES SOREL

février 1907

Revue critique:

Grandeur et décadence de Rome: Antoine et Cléopâtre
tome IV, par Guglielmo Ferrero, pp. 171-93.

avril 1907

"Le prétendu Socialisme juridique," pp. 321-48.

mai 1907 Revu

Revue critique:

Les cahiers de Jeunesse de Renan, pp. 456-79.

juin 1907

"Jean-Jacques Rousseau," pp. 507-33.

juillet 1907

"La crise morale et religieuse," pp. 13-38.

août et septembre 1907

"Lettre á M. Daniel Halévy " pp. 137-66.

octobre 1907

"L'Evolution créatrice," pp. 257-83.

décembre 1907

"L'Evolution créatrice" (suite) pp. 478-95.

janvier 1908

"L'Evolution créatrice (suite)" pp. 34-53.

mars 1908

"L'Evolution créatrice (suite)" pp. 184-95.

avril 1908

"L'Evolution créatrice (fin)" pp. 276-95.

juin 1908

"la politique américaine," pp. 449-57.

juillet 1908

Revue critique:

Grandeur et Décadence de Rome Tome V, pp. 36-52.

septembre 1908

"Les Intellectuels à Athènes," pp. 214-36.

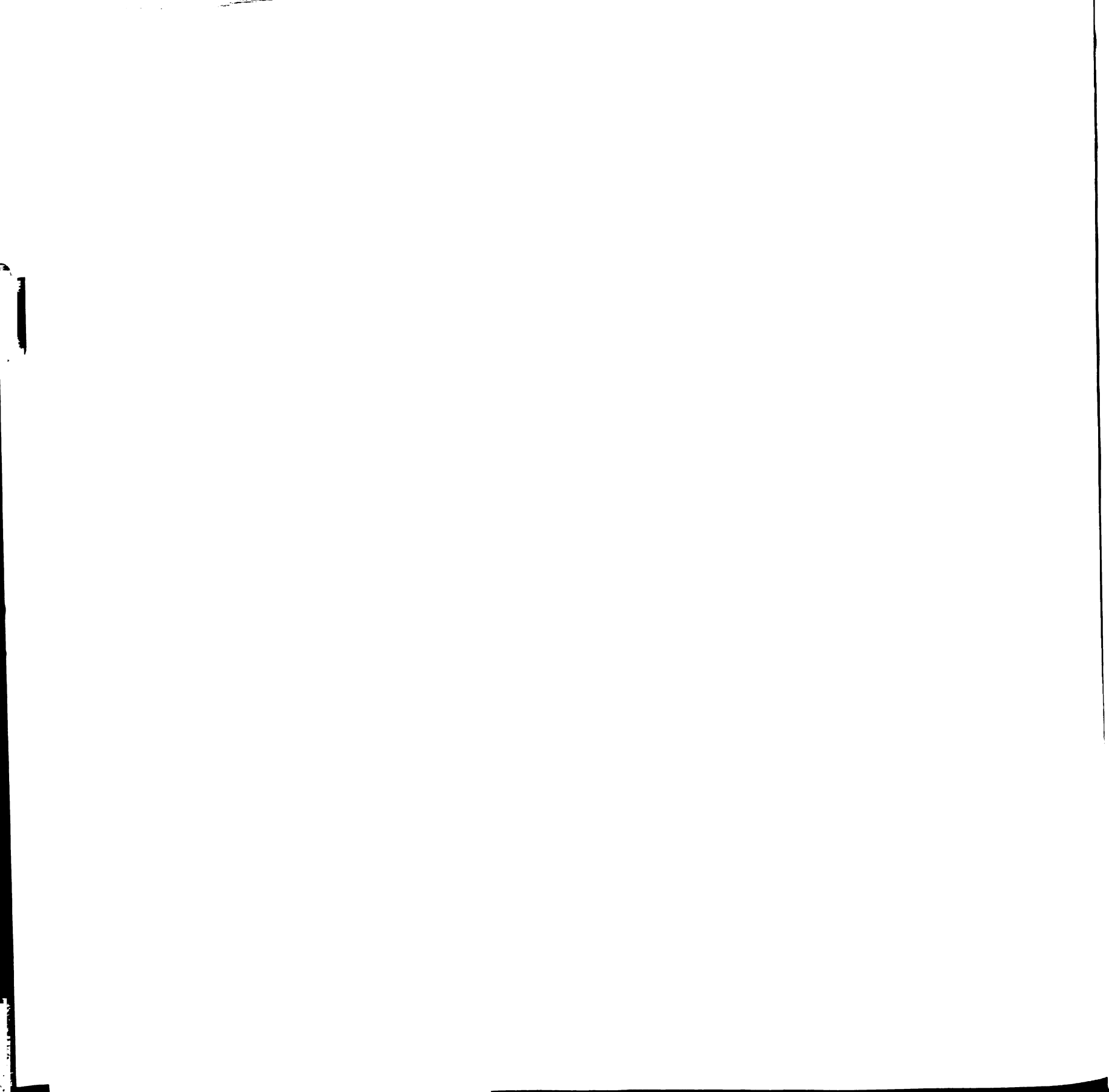
A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER VI

This chapter opens with Georges Sorel's analysis entitled The Decomposition of Marxism in which he attacked the dogmatic use of Marx by contemporary Marxists. He examines revolutionary and utopian Socialism and condemned the desire to seek control of the state's power, while advocating the adoption of Syndicalism and the myth of the general strike as a means to reinvigorate Marxism. He then proceeds to the Dreyfus affair which he considered from the standpoint of a revolution whose major importance was its anti-clerical result.

The role of religion in the modern world is the subject of Sorel's study entitled "Religion Today" in which he discussed the impact of William James on the conflict between science and religion. Chapter VI concludes with an analysis of Sorel's lengthy study "Perspectives on the Problems of Philosophy" in which he contrasted the Greek and Christian approach to morality and discussed the role of metaphysics in the modern world. He concluded with a statement of the importance

of Henri Bergson for the future of philosophy and restated his conception of the artificial and the natural milieu.

The letters to Croce in the appendix shed additional light on Sorel's valuation of William James and Henri Bergson.



CHAPTER VI

MARX, DREYFUS; RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY: 1907 - 1918

La Décomposition Du Marxisme

During the period of Georges Sorel's prolific contributions to Le mouvement socialiste, between 1906 and 1908, he delivered an address entitled "la Décomposition du Marxisme" to an international conference of syndical-socialists who had gathered in Paris to consider the contemporary Socialist agenda.¹ On April 3, 1907, Sorel opened his address with a denunciation of Marx's disciples whom he charged " . . . a beaucoup contribué à rendre stérile toute critique."² This dogmatism was unacceptable with respect to the study of

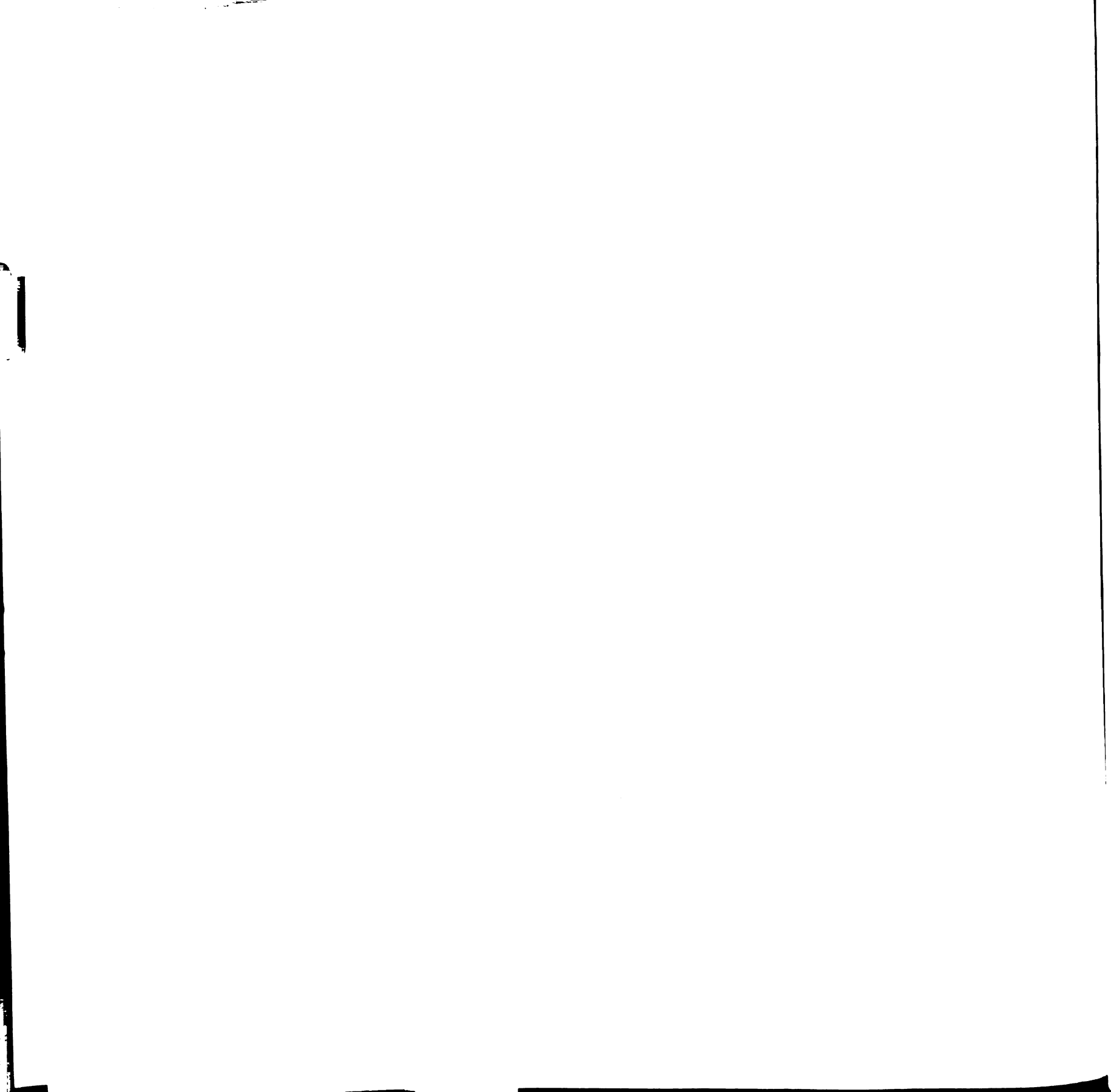
¹"la Décomposition du Marxisme" was first delivered as an address by Georges Sorel in Paris on April 3, 1907, before a meeting of syndical-socialists which included Victor Griffuelhes, Arturo Labriola, Roberto Michels, Boris Kritchewsky and Herbert Lagardelle. The address was published under the title La Décomposition du Marxisme (Georges Sorel, Marcel Rivière, Paris, 1908) and it is this 1st edition which has served as the reference for all direct quotes.

²Ibid., p. 6. " . . . contributed much to render all critiques sterile."

Marx, who, Sorel believed, had failed to present a didactic expository form in his work, and especially Capital had presented a " . . . mélange bizarre de théories général, de polémiques et de satires amères, d'illustrations et de digressions historiques."³ The purpose of criticism was, according to Sorel, to develop Marx's insights, although many of his disciples had chosen instead to repeat vague formula, and adopt sentiments of almost religious piety before his works. It would be better, Sorel affirmed, to follow the advice of Benedetto Croce who had written that the " . . . thought of Marx must be freed (débarrasser) from the literary form which he adopted, so that the questions which he asked could be studied more completely on the basis of new historical developments."⁴ Too many Marxists had rejected this advice, Sorel complained, with the result that they had produced only résumés which were more obscure than Marx's original text. To counter these tendencies, and to search for a possible renaissance of Socialism, Georges Sorel purposed to reexamine Marxism; to seek what he

³Ibid., p. 5. From Benedetto Croce, Matérialisme historique et économie marxiste, Paris, 1897, p. 94, in La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 5. " . . . bizarre mixture of general theories, polemics and bitter satire, illustrations and historic digressions."

⁴Ibid., p. 8. From Croce, Matérialisme historique et économie marxiste, p. 114.



called "le marxisme de Marx," and to demonstrate through this study " . . . comment je conçois cette nouvelle manière de comprendre la décomposition du marxisme."⁵

Sorel's analysis began with a consideration of what he called "utopistes" in whom he noted a consistent tendency to " . . . appel aux sentiments de justice quand ils prênaient des reconstructions de la société."⁶ Distinguishing the utopian from the real, Sorel stated his conviction that all social organizations presented situations in which the established law (droit) was offensive because no matter how perfected a judicial system might be, it could not be applied perfectly in every instance " . . . pas plus que la science ne saurait être parfaitement adéquate à la nature."⁷ Even such apparently rigid systems as law and science, he observed, required flexibility. This required, Sorel believed, a certain arbitrary additive to the law to operate as empiricism did to soften the rigidity of science. Reforms came about, he noted, when offended public opinion demanded the

⁵Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 12.
" . . . how I conceive this new manner of understanding the decomposition of marxism."

⁶Ibid., p. 13. " . . . call to sentiments of justice when they preach reconstructions of society."

⁷Ibid. " . . . not more than science would know how to be perfectly adequate to nature."

elimination of the discord which disturbed it, and in this process, he believed, changes in judicial decrees consolidated the existing system by increasing respect for the law.

Because public opinion was greatly influenced by men of letters, Sorel believed " . . . on peut dire qu'il y a toujours à côté de la justice des juristes une justice romanesque, pleine d'arbitraire et de paradox, dans laquelle peuvent puiser tous les hommes qui ont du goût pour imaginer des changements sociaux."⁸ All the historical movement of law, Sorel believed, could be explained in terms of the conflict between an existing body of judicial formula and the prevailing sense of morality. The utopians had failed to appreciate the operation of this conflict and with it the need for judicial flexibility and therefore " . . . ils cherchent à créer un monde tout à fait logique; mais . . . leurs projets engendreraient des conséquences qui choqueraient bien plus fréquemment nos sentiments que ne les choquent les usages actuels."⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 14. " . . . we can say that there is always on the side of justice of jurists a romantic justice, full of arbitrariness and paradox, in which all men who have the taste for imagining social changes can draw."

⁹Ibid. " . . . they seek to create an entirely logical world; but . . . their projects would engender consequences that would shock our sentiments much more frequently than present usages."

The successors to the utopians of the nineteenth century had been more conservative in that they did not call for a complete break with the past as he believed Charles Fourier had done. Sorel quoted Proudhon who had rejected Fourier's disregard for the value of tradition and history: "Quoi! cet immense travail de l'humanité serait non avvenu, l'histoire n'aurait aucun sens et tout ce mouvement n'aurait été qu'une longue déception!"¹⁰

In the period just before 1848, such socialists as François Vidal (Répartition des richesses: ou De la justice distributive en économie sociale, Paris, 1846) sought to live in what Sorel called the real world; they hoped to lead all the political parties to adopt their projects for reform. Sorel noted a characteristic Socialist view of this epoch: "Les socialistes ne veulent point transformer d'un seul coup la société, bouleverser le monde; leur prétention serait de le convertir."¹¹

¹⁰Sorel quoted from a letter by Proudhon to Considerant entitled "Avertissement aux propriétaires" in Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Oeuvres, Paris, 1866 - 1883, tome II, pp. 55-56. Ibid., p. 15. Sorel added the observation: "Nous venons de voir se produire une évolution, qui semble nécessaire, de l'utopie à la pratique; cette évolution peut être encore regardée comme se produisant de l'imagination à l'intelligence, du romanesque au droit, de l'absolu au relatif, de la simplicité à la complexité." La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 16. "What! this immense work of humanity would be cancelled, history would have no sense and this whole movement would only have been a long deception."

¹¹Sorel quoted from François Vidal, Répartition des richesses, pp. 464-65. (See note 10.) In La

The Socialists of this time preached social peace, and contemporary writers who were concerned with social reform, Sorel charged, had added little to what "les anciens socialistes" had said.

A second element which Sorel found to have entered into modern Socialism he identified as the "revolutionary idea" which he believed had been identified since antiquity with the concept of the battle of the poor against the rich and as such, he noted, was a rudimentary form of class conflict. An entire body of literature had been devoted to giving the poor an absolute confidence in their power by exalting their virtues and " . . . en ruinant le prestige des classes dominantes."¹² The men who came to represent this revolutionary tradition, Sorel insisted, were the street fighters whom Bernstein had labeled "blanquistes." The manner by which they came to power, Sorel continued, was not important to them, but the possession of power was represented as the solution of all their difficulties. This historic movement acquired a new and unexpected aspect, with the intervention of a party which would lead the revolution. It was henceforth no longer the

Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 17. "Socialists do not want to transform society in a single blow, overturning the world; their pretention is to convert it."

¹²Ibid., p. 22. " . . . in ruining the prestige of dominant classes."

circumstance, Sorel charged, " . . . à une classe de pauvres agissant sous l'influence d'instincts, mais à les hommes instruits qui raisonnent sur les intérêts d'un parti."¹³ According to Georges Sorel, political parties were coalitions formed for the purpose of obtaining advantages which would lead to the control of the state. The party leadership was characteristically a small staff of men who " . . . appartiennent à l'aristocratie que la révolution va atteindre d'une manière très directe."¹⁴ The impact of the introduction of political parties into a revolutionary movement had the result that the mass, upon whom the movement depended, would come to accept the leadership of men whose interests were distinct from their own. These men wanted to render the mass a service, Sorel observed, " . . . mais à la condition que les masses leur livreront l'Etat, objet de leur convoitise."¹⁵

¹³Ibid., p. 24. " . . . of a poor class acting under the influence of instincts, but of instructed men who reason on the interests of a party."

¹⁴Ibid. Sorel added: " . . . c'est que ces hommes, n'ayant pas trouvé dans leur classe les moyens de s'emparer du pouvoir, ont dû recruter une armée fidèle dans des classes dont les intérêts sont en opposition avec ceux de leur famille." " . . . belong to the aristocracy that the revolution is going to overtake in a very direct manner."

¹⁵Ibid., p. 25. Sorel's idea that the masses were the true historical agents who advanced the interests of the world was drawn from a study by Paul Guiraud, Fustel de Coulanges, p. 202. The citation was incomplete. " . . . but under the condition that the masses deliver them the state, object of their covetousness."

In this manner, Sorel concluded, the revolt of the poor
 " . . . peut servir de base à la formation d'un 'Etat
 populaire,' formé de bourgeois qui désirent continuer
 la vie bourgeoise, qui maintiennent les idéologies bour-
 geoises, mais qui se donnent comme les mandataires du
 prolétariat."¹⁶

The tendency of the popular state, Sorel con-
 tinued, was continuously to enlarge the scope of its
 activity with the result that it must constantly increase
 the number of its employees. A large civil servant group
 with interests different from those of the proletariat,
 Sorel believed, would thus come into being and would
 " . . . renforce ainsi la défense de la forme bourgeoise."¹⁷
 This was the realm of what Sorel called "le monde gouverne-
 mental," which he believed had transformed many revolu-
 tionary sympathizers: " . . . il devient un excellent
 bourgeois avec la plus grande facilité."¹⁸ This popular
 government, he charged, would henceforth be preoccupied
 with the incorporation of the proletariat into the bour-
 geoisie.

¹⁶Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 25.
 " . . . can serve as the base of the formation of a 'popu-
 lar state,' formed of bourgeois who desire to continue
 bourgeois life, who maintain bourgeois ideologies but who
 give themselves as mandatories to the proletariat."

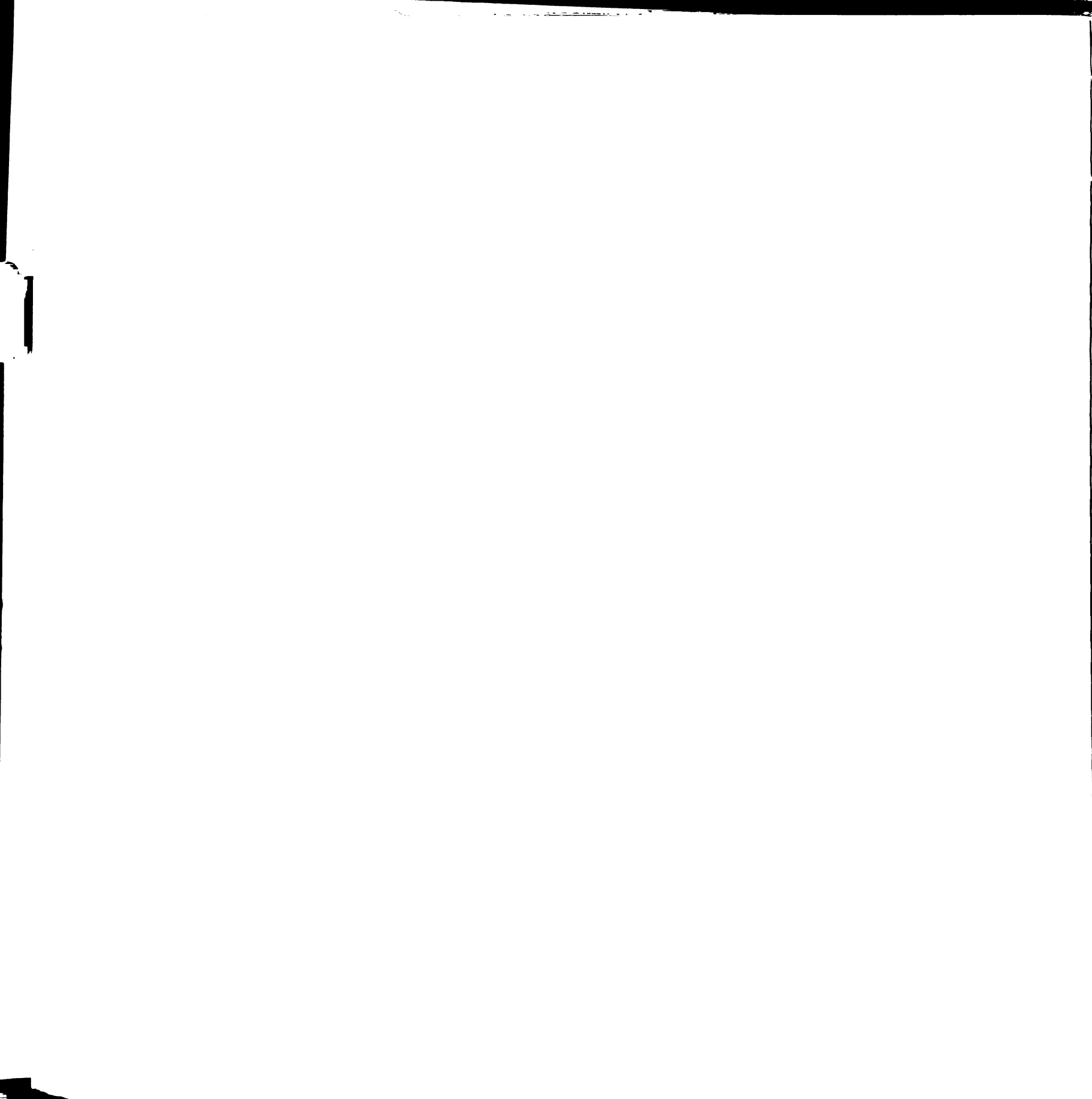
¹⁷Ibid., p. 26. " . . . thus reinforce the
 defense of bourgeois form."

¹⁸Ibid. " . . . it becomes an excellent bour-
 geoisie with the greatest ease."

Sorel complained further that The Communist Manifesto contained postulates which had not been precisely defined as a result of which it had been the source of both utopian and revolutionary conclusions. The verbal imagery of Marx and Engels had influenced utopians to condemn the bourgeoisie in the name of eternal justice and on the other hand it had been the source of an incitement toward a revolt of the poor. The need to reconcile these positions had led to the decomposition of Marxism, and Georges Sorel purposed to undertake a study of this problem which he charged had long been ignored by the Marxists. Was there not, he asked, something in Marxism other than the quoted formula whose value seemed to be more and more open to question? Marxism, Sorel concluded, was a philosophical conception designed to clarify social struggles, and not a collection of political precepts.¹⁹

The concept of the revolt of the poor conducted under the leadership of a revolutionary general staff which Sorel identified as "le blanquisme," would, he charged, create the condition in which the future would depend upon the good will of the leaders. This hypothesis, he insisted, was unacceptable to Marx who considered that the revolution would be made by a proletariat of producers

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 33. Sorel asked: "Ne serait-ce point plutôt une conception philosophique propre à éclairer les luttes sociales qu'un recueil de préceptes politiques?"



" . . . qui ont acquis la capacité économique, l'intelligence du travail et le sens juridique sous l'influence même des conditions de la production."²⁰ Sorel insisted that the proletariat must proceed from discipline toward organization, which implied a juridicial constitution without which the class could not become fully developed. Marx, Sorel continued, as a result of his historical perspective could not acquire the working class experience needed to formulate a clear picture of how the proletariat could attain the degree of maturity requisite to its emancipating revolution. Thus Marx, according to Sorel, " . . . s'est généralement borné à donner des formules sommaires et symboliques."²¹ It was in the realm of action that Marx was less adept, Sorel noted, and he speculated that action most usually occurred when propelled by memories which were more vivid in the mind than was immediate reality.²²

²⁰Ibid., p. 45. Sorel noted also that the revolt of the poor under the leadership of a small party " . . . peut appartenir à n'importe quelle époque; elle est indépendante du régime de la production." " . . . who had acquired the economic capacity, intelligence of work, and judicial sense under the very influence of production conditions."

²¹Ibid., p. 47. " . . . generally restricts himself to giving summary and symbolic formulae."

²²Ibid. Sorel wrote: "Il ne faut pas oublier que nous n'agissons guère que sous l'action de souvenirs qui sont beaucoup plus présents à notre esprit que les faits actuels."

Sorel concluded that Marxism differed from Blanquism especially in its discounting of the idea of party, and in its reliance upon the idea of class. Party objectives, Sorel complained, were always directed toward the conquest of state power which was then utilized in behalf of the party and its allies. Marx wished to suppress the state, which, Sorel concurred, was not an entity to be perfected, but to be abolished. Bernstein who had attacked Marx's conception of the revolution as a single act seeing in this the influence on Marx of the Hegelian dialectic was reprimanded by Sorel: "S'il (Bernstein) avait été au fond de choses, il aurait reconnu quelque chose de plus important encore: c'est que son maître a toujours conçu la révolution sous une forme mythique."²³ This revolutionary claim as well as Marx's hypothetical description of the general direction of capitalism in Capital (Volume I; "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation") represented what Sorel called "une mythe sociale." "We have here, he wrote, a vivid sketch which gives a very clear idea of change . . .

²³Ibid., p. 54. Bernstein was concerned, Sorel noted, " . . . that the idea of a revolution in a single act seemed incompatible with the necessity of political life in modern countries." "If he had been at the heart of things, he would recognize something more important still: that his master always conceived the revolution under mythic form."

mais dont aucun détail ne saurait être discuté comme un fait historique prévisible."²⁴

In seeking to explain how minds were prepared for revolution, Sorel insisted that history demonstrated a constant recourse to social myths whose form varied from epoch to epoch. Because Marx realized that the contemporary age required more sober propaganda than former times, he freed his revolutionary myth " . . . de toutes les fantasmagories qui ont trop souvent fait chercher un pays de Cocagne."²⁵ The Marxian philosophy had one thing in view: to lead the working class to an understanding that its future hinged on the idea of class struggle, and to organize itself for this struggle such that it could eventually dispense with its masters. Only this idea, that the proletariat must organize itself separately from the bourgeoisie was, according to Sorel, capable of reviving Marxism as a revolutionary movement. This was the role which the anti-political revolutionary Syndicalist organization must assume.²⁶ But the parliamentary

²⁴Ibid., p. 55. " . . . but whose every detail would not know how to be discussed as a foreseeable historic fact."

²⁵Ibid. " . . . of all phantasmagoria that has too often made us seek the land of milk and honey."

²⁶Sorel identified Fernand Pelloutier as the anti-politician and propagandist of revolutionary syndicalism who " . . . avait un sens très net de la nécessité qui s'impose de fonder le socialisme sur une absolue séparation des classes et sur l'abandon de toute espérance d'une rénovation politique." Ibid., p. 58.

Socialists denounced this counter offensive, Sorel noted, because some anarchists entered the Syndicalist movement, seemingly in contradiction with Marxian dogma. The cult of words, and dogmatic adherence to formula, Sorel noted scornfully, was " . . . des etiquettes . . . pour les parlementaires . . . mais les mots importent peu à celui qui veut aller au fond des choses."²⁷ Writers who criticized Marx, Sorel added, had often reproached him for having spoken in " . . . un langage plein d'images" which they did not consider suitable for scientific investigation. Sorel disagreed: "Ce sont les parties symboliques, regardées jadis comme ayant une valeur douteuse, qui représentent, au contraire, la valeur de l'oeuvre."²⁸ The teachings of Henri Bergson demonstrated, Sorel concluded " . . . que le mouvement s'exprime surtout au moyen d'images que les formules mythiques sont celles dans lesquelles s'enveloppe la pensée fondamentale d'un philosophe, et que la métaphysique ne saurait se servir du langage qui convient à la science."²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 59. " . . . etiquette . . . for parliamentarians . . . but words bring little to him who wishes to go to the heart of things."

²⁸ Ibid., p. 60. "These are symbolic part, formerly regarded as having a doubtful value, who representing, on the contrary, the value of the work."

²⁹ Ibid. Inexplicably Irving Horowitz's English translation of "The Decomposition of Marxism" in

Sorel concluded that Marx's idea of apocalypse (la catastrophe) corresponded perfectly to the concept of the general strike, which symbolized the advent of the new world to revolutionary Syndicalists. And only unified, militant workers' organizations, Sorel added, could serve to clarify the idea of class struggle. However, Sorel warned, it must not be expected that the revolutionary movement could ever follow a pre-determined direction. It could only be studied in its own development up to the present: "Tout en lui est imprévisible."³⁰ But one must, Sorel repeated, look with suspicion on political revolutions, and he concluded his analysis of the decomposition of Marxism by suggesting for study the Dreyfus affair which he noted: ". . . peut être comparée fort bien à une révolution politique."³¹

Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962) does not translate this important statement. See Horowitz, p. 251. ". . . that the movement expresses itself especially by means of images, that mythical formula are those in which fundamental thought of a philosophy envelops itself, and that metaphysics would not know not to use language that fits science."

³⁰Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 62. "Everything in it is unforeseeable."

³¹Ibid. ". . . perhaps strongly compares to a political revolution."

La Révolution Dreyfusienne

Ernest Renan's final judgment of the French Revolution, Sorel noted in his 1909 study of the Dreyfus affair, envisioned it as " . . . une oeuvre aussi inconsciente qu'un cyclone emportant sans choix tout ce qui est à sa portée."³² Georges Sorel believed that, disencumbered of "ces formules magnifiques des images" which Renan employed in his discussion of the French Revolution, it would be possible to obtain what he called "conclusions prosaïques" with important application to "l'affaire Dreyfus." But the historian who wished to study such cataclysms must be warned in advance, Sorel believed, against resorting to the claimed genius of certain great men to account for the change in the course of events. Agreeing with Renan, Sorel noted that if these protagonists were studied closely the shadow which concealed their mediocrity would vanish " . . . pour montrer que leur prétendu génie est une illusion engendrée par la

³²Quoted by Georges Sorel as: Ernest Renan, Feuilles détachées, pp. 242-43, in la Révolution Dreyfusienne, by Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcle Riviere, 1909), p. 4. Renan also wrote that the men of the revolution were " . . . des inconscients sublimes, amnistiés par leur jeunesse, leur inexpérience, leur foi . . . Ces hommes ne furent pas grands! ils furent les ouvriers d'une grande heure," in Feuilles détachées, pp. 245-48. " . . . a work as unconscious as a cyclone, bringing without choice everything in its reach."

gravité des troubles au milieu desquels ils ont vécu."³³ Sorel scoffed at the value of the detailed analysis of personalities in the Dreyfus affair as being interesting only as a serialized novel, but he insisted that if the Dreyfus affair were to be studied as a revolution it would then become interesting from a philosophical point of view. La Révolution Dreyfusienne, published in Paris in 1909, was therefore introduced by Georges Sorel as his attempt to analyze the affair from a philosophic perspective: "Je veux surtout appeller l'attention sur les analogies qui existent entre nos récents bouleversements et nos anciennes révolutions politiques; ces analogies peuvent servir: soit à mieux comprendre notre devenir social, soit à mieux analyser le passé."³⁴

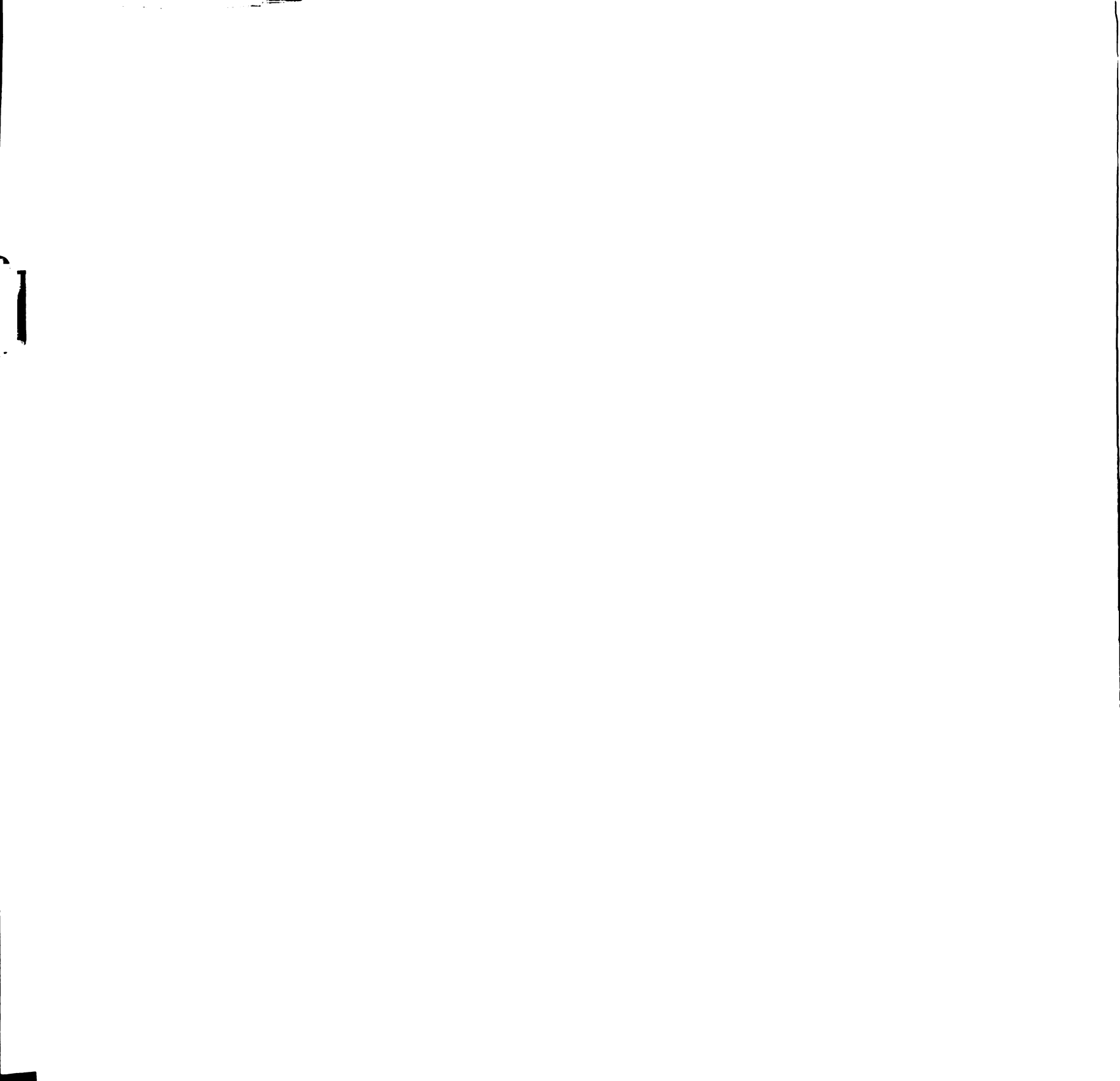
In an initial discussion of the general composition of political revolutions, Geroges Sorel distinguished two periods. The first period, he believed, was characterized by the problems connected with the fall of the old government: battles without mercy, often bloody,

³³Sorel, la Révolution Dreyfusienne, p. 6.
" . . . in order to show that their pretended genius is an illusion engendered by the seriousness of troubles in the middle of which they lived."

³⁴Ibid., pp. 10-11. "I especially wish to call attention to the analogies that exist between our recent upheavals and our former political revolutions; these analogies can serve either to better understand our social future or to better analyze the past."

instituted by those who sought power, followed by a ferociously partial legislation which sought to destroy the power of the defeated. Because these episodes were more passionate than those of ordinary times, Sorel believed they were especially appealing to talented writers who " . . . habiles dans l'art d'extraire des documents les récits les plus aptes à intéresser un public étendu, trouvent donc dans l'étude d'une telle époque de belles occasions pour exercer leur adresse."³⁵ The second period of a political revolution, Sorel characterized as one of calm constraint and authoritarianism. This period appeared colorless compared to the first period so much so that historians had difficulty believing that these calm times could belong to the same epoch as the preceding to which the name revolution was exclusively assigned. Sorel believed that it was a mistake to attach an exaggerated importance to the acts of force which marked the initial stage of political revolutions, because he asserted, that this allowed "les chroniqueurs" to dispense with seeking the true causes of change: "Ce qu'il y a de vraiment essentiel, c'est la transformation qui se produit dans le cours des

³⁵ Ibid., p. 11. " . . . able in the art of extracting from documents the accounts most apt to interest an extended public, thus find in the study of such an epoch beautiful occasions to exercise their direction."

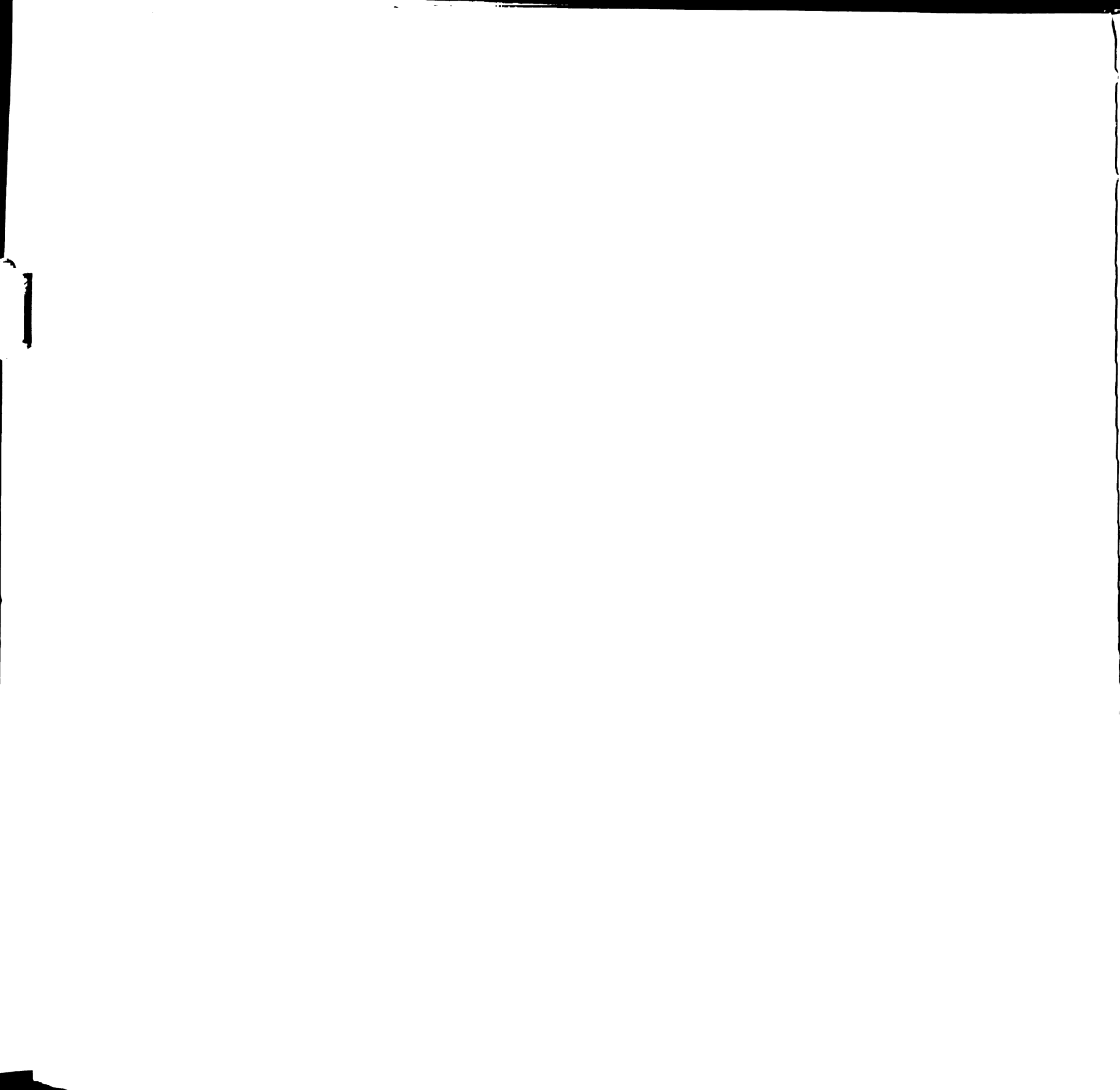


idées."³⁶ The cycle was closed, Sorel concluded, when the hopes which filled the hearts of the first promoters of revolution no longer excite a passionate following and when these exhausted hopes came to be denounced as dangerous illusions. The victors, he added, seek to erase as quickly as possible the memory of the tyrannical measures which they employed during the crisis. The results achieved during the calm period were represented as constituting all which was essential in the first. Finally when calm was widespread and the future seemed assured, the new leadership " . . . s'occupe d'élever la nouvelle génération dans l'idée que la nouvelle régime est fondé sur des théories de droit public incontestables."³⁷

The Dreyfus affair demonstrated, Sorel believed, the great role which literary figures always played in revolutions. He noted that Anatole France, who had been a former supporter of the order of the day, upon taking up the dreyfusard cause and finding himself in the company of Emile Zola, whose writing he had formerly

³⁶ Ibid., p. 12. "What is truly essential is the transformation which produced itself in the course of ideas."

³⁷ Ibid., p. 15. " . . . occupies itself with raising the new generation in the idea that the new regime is founded on theories of public, uncontestable law."



characterized as "mauvaise," came to change these literary appreciations. Anatole France thus came to discover high moral intentions in the books which had previously appeared so detestable to him. The letter "J'accuse," Sorel speculated, ". . . changeait les valeurs de tous les écrits de Zola."³⁸ But the writings of Zola, according to Sorel, did not justify his assumed position as the leader of the "école réaliste" because ". . . en fait il (Zola) ne soupçonna jamais ce qui constitue la réalité; il n'apercevait des choses que de grossiers contours."³⁹

One of the most striking discoveries of his study of the period of the Dreyfus affair was the scorn which the dreyfusards felt for the law officers and the judges (la magistrature) of the state. Without respectable magistrates he asked, what becomes of the law? The French Republic, he charged, did not possess such a magistrature: "On pourrait multiplier les exemples pour montrer qu'aux yeux des dreyfusards la servilité, la sottise et la mauvaise foi sont les qualités maîtresses des magistrats

³⁸ Ibid., p. 23. ". . . changed the value of all the writings of Zola."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 29. ". . . in fact, he (Zola) never suspected what constitutes reality; he only noticed things in rough outlines."

que nous a donnés la République."⁴⁰ The role of the Catholic church in France during this period, Sorel found to be initially ambiguous. The ultimate anti-dreyfusard position which it assumed, he believed, was directed by the pope in Rome: "Il y a de bonnes raisons de penser que les catholiques suivirent des indications venant du Vatican et que le vrai chef de l'antidreyfusisme fut Léon XIII."⁴¹ The effect of this participation, Sorel believed, was to demonstrate that the "laïque" associations, so long feared by the legislators, offered no serious danger, while at the same time it appeared necessary to take extreme precautions against the clerical associations. A tragic consequence of the anti-clerical campaign in France in the wake of the Dreyfus affair, Sorel concluded, was the introduction of arbitrary procedures in the administration of justice, a characteristic which he noted especially in Combes about whom he observed with irony: "On pourrait supposer que son éducation cléricale ne fut pas étrangère à cette

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 45. Sorel noted that Aristide Briand " . . . pourrait, à bon droit, parler de 'ses juges' et de 'ses domestiques judiciaires.'" Ibid., p. 48. "We could multiply the examples to show that in the eyes of dreyfusards servility, stupidity and bad faith are the master qualities of magistrates which the Republic has given us."

⁴¹Ibid., p. 51. "There are good reasons to think that the Catholics followed the directions coming from the Vatican and that the true chief of anti-dreyfusism was Leon XIII."

attitude; le prêtre n'a déjà pas à un haut degré le respect du droit, mais le prêtre défroqué applique dans la vie le rationalisme le plus mesquin."⁴² When the history of the Dreyfus affair was written, Sorel believed, a great importance would be attached to the anticlerical struggle which, he charged, had resulted in the diminution of respect for "la sûreté du droit" without which he warned " . . . il n'y a pas de liberté."⁴³

La Religion D'Aujourd'Hui

Georges Sorel believed that the role of religion in his contemporary world was an unresolved problem which would continue to perplex future generations, and having concluded his study of what he called the Dreyfus "revolution," Sorel submitted in 1909 an essay entitled "la Religion d'aujourd'hui" for publication in the Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale.⁴⁴ Impressed by an observation which Ribot had made in 1907 which affirmed that: "Depuis que l'homme a une histoire . . . aucun des besoins et

⁴²Ibid., p. 55. "One could suppose that his clerical education was not foreign to this attitude; the priest did not already have a high degree of respect from the law, but the defrocked priest applied in life the most paltry rationalism."

⁴³Ibid., p. 56. " . . . the certainty of law" " . . . there is no liberty."

⁴⁴Georges Sorel, "la Religion d'aujourd'hui," Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1909), pp. 240-73 and May, 1909, pp. 413-47.

désirs qu'il a manifestés dès l'origine n'a disparu, et les religions, ont tenu un si grand rôle dans le monde qu'il faut bien admettre qu'elles sont profondément enracinées dans la nature humaine."⁴⁵ Sorel proceeded to inquire into the nature of this religious sentiment which, he agreed, was not in the process of dissolution. Under the influence of Renan, whom Sorel believed was an excellent witness to the religious developments of the nineteenth century, Sorel noted the tendency " . . . réserver le nom de religion aux systèmes qui offrent de très grandes analogies avec le christianisme."⁴⁶ In this context the nineteenth century, he continued, thought of Judaism, Islamism and Buddhism as religions with connections to Christianity. August Comte, Sorel observed, did not represent the spirit of the nineteenth century but rather was more in harmony with the ideas of the

⁴⁵Sorel quoted from an essay by Ribot which appeared in Mercure de France, April 15, 1907, pp. 578-79 in "la Religion d'aujourd'hui," p. 240. "Since man has a history . . . none of the desires and needs that he has manifested from the origin have disappeared, and religions have held so great a role in the world that it is very necessary to admit that they (religions) are profoundly deep-rooted in human nature."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 244. Renan had written: "Christianisme est devenir presque synonyme de religion. Tout ce qui se fera en dehors de cette grande et bonne tradition chrétienne sera stérile." Sorel documented this quote as Renan, Vie de Jésus, pp. 461-62, in la Religion d'aujourd'hui, p. 244. " . . . to reserve the name of religion to systems that offer very large analogies to christianity."

eighteenth century, and thus Comte's ideas, Sorel concluded, " . . . pourraient être considérés comme non existantes pour les philosophes."⁴⁷ To August Comte who Sorel believed had attempted to suppress the supernatural in religion and who emphasized ideas relative to immortality, Sorel opposed the work of William James whom he believed had sought experimental knowledge of the supernatural experience and regarded ideas on immortality as secondary.⁴⁸

In his analysis of the religious experience, Sorel reported, William James had advanced the thesis that this experience was the result of the subliminal introducing itself into consciousness, and in this condition, Sorel added, it would be impossible to know if the subliminal was entirely " . . . à nous ou bien s'il ne contient point parfois, à notre insu, quelques puissances extérieures."⁴⁹ What occurred in the religious

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 246. Sorel added: " . . . rien n'est moins religieux que la prétendre religion d'A. Comte," p. 247. " . . . would be able to be considered as non-existent for philosophers."

⁴⁸This appears to be the first reference by Sorel to William James whom he characterized as "l'illustre psychologue américain."

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 264. Sorel referenced William James, L'expérience religieuse, p. 205. " . . . in us or even if it does not contain sometimes, without our knowledge, some exterior powers."

experience, according to Sorel's understanding of James, was an expansion of consciousness:

L'homme voit clairement que son moi supérieur et potentiel est son véritable moi. Il arrive à se rendre compte que ce moi supérieur fait partie de quelque chose de plus grand que lui, mais de même nature; quelque chose qui agit dans l'univers en dehors de lui, qui peut lui venir en aide, et s'offre à lui comme un refuge suprême, quand son être inférieur à fait naufrage.⁵⁰

Science, Sorel believed, had no basis to oppose this idea of the religious experience, which he noted, could occur in complete ignorance of the Christian doctrine.

Sorel confided his own inclination to regard a very particularized pantheistic system with sympathy, and he advanced a formula which he believed represented this doctrine: "La religion est une sorte de synthèse ou plutôt d'union intime et spirituelle de l'instinct et de l'intelligence, dans laquelle chacun d'eux, fondu avec l'autre et par là même transfiguré et exalté, possède une plénitude et une puissance créatrice qui lui échappe quand il agit séparément."⁵¹ Sorel additionally

⁵⁰ Sorel, *La Religion d'aujourd'hui*, p. 265. Man sees clearly that his superior and potential me is his true me. He comes to realize that this superior me is part of something bigger than him, but of the same nature; something who acts in the universe outside of him who can come and aid him and offer itself to him as a supreme refuge, when his inferior being is shipwrecked.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 438. Sorel admitted that this definition could be understood in another sense than pantheistic: ". . . mais elles perdraient alors quelque chose de leur profondeur." "Religion is a sort of

asserted that he tended to regard religious dogma and sacraments as "populaires et provisoires" symbolic constructions. These symbolic constructions, which, he believed, the theologians had misrepresented as unalterable dogma, Sorel believed were only approximations based on imagination which served " . . . donner un corps à la foi."⁵² What seemed essential in the religious experience as identified by William James was a profound feeling of the extraordinary power of adversity against which one could not prevail without help. Religious movements which denied this adversity in the world, he concluded, would be incapable of producing the religious experience as defined by James and to this extent Sorel believed such movements would fail to attract a following.

Sorel scoffed at those who predicted the future role of religion in human life and insisted that the movement of human things was too complicated to be determined in advance. Confining his observations to conditions in contemporary France in the wake of the Dreyfus

synthesis or rather intimate and spiritual union of instinct and intelligence, in which each of them, melted with the other and transfigured and exalted by it, possesses a plenitude and creative power which escapes it when it acts separately."

⁵²Ibid., p. 441. Quoting from Hartmann, Sorel noted: "Le panthéisme seul réalise le rêve le plus hardi des mystiques sans heurter la raison." Sorel quoted: Hartmann, la religion de l'avenir, p. 166, in La Religion d'aujourd'hui, p. 442. " . . . to give a body to faith."

revolution, Sorel observed that as the institutions in which the Christian church had been influential were gradually laicized, there would be a corresponding diminution in the polemic between science and theology: "L'esprit scientifique régnera dans son domaine propre . . . dans les laboratoires; l'esprit religieux régnera dans le sanctuaire; chacun s'occupera de ses affaires, sans vouloir empiéter sur la spécialité d'autrui."⁵³

Vues Sur Les Problèmes De La Philosophie

Having relegated science to the laboratory and religion to a sanctuary, Sorel turned his attention to a summary analysis of the history of European philosophy which appeared under the title "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie" in the September, 1910, and January, 1911, issues of Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale.⁵⁴ Initially Sorel attacked an illusion which he believed had greatly obstructed the European mind with respect to its understanding of the nature and function of philosophy. This false idea of philosophy, he stated, " . . . consiste

⁵³Ibid., p. 581. "The scientific will reign in its own domain . . . in the laboratories; the religious spirit will reign in the sanctuary; each will occupy itself with its own affairs, without wishing to encroach on the specialty of the other."

⁵⁴Georges Sorel, "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie," Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1910-1911).

à prendre la philosophie pour une sorte de science, ayant son domaine propre, découvrant des principes et aboutissant, par la déduction, à des propositions que nous devrions tous accepter."⁵⁵ According to Sorel this represented a "perversion de la réflexion" which resulted from the attempt of the ancient Greek philosophers to submit ideas to "la discipline de leur logique." This was especially true in the moral realm where Socrates and many other Greek philosophers were occupied in teaching the Greeks " . . . des codes de l'éducation civique, destinés à leur apprendre comment ils pourraient se constituer une nature morale propre à leur assurer une vie que ne pourraient critiquer les gens raisonnables. . . ." ⁵⁶ The Greek moralists, Sorel believed, imputed moral faults to ignorance and they assigned to the realm of intelligence what Sorel observed " . . . nous sommes habitués à les rapporter à la volonté."⁵⁷ This is why, Sorel concluded, the Greek

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 581. " consists of taking philosophy for a sort of science, having its own domain, discovering principles and bordering, by deduction, on propositions that we predict to accept all."

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 582-83. " . . . codes of civic education, destined to teach them how they could form a moral nature appropriate to assure them a life that reasonable people could not criticize."

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 583. " . . . we are used to relating them to will."

philosophers conceived that morality could be reduced to a code of education which could be learned as any other métier.

Christianity, according to Sorel, augmented this Greek idea, by attributing great value to the affirmation of certain dogma and by subordinating all to theology. Sorel wrote " . . . la morale devint une jurisprudence des tribunaux pénitentiels, propre à conduire l'âme sur la voie du salut."⁵⁸ These scholastic theories of the Middle Ages were rejected by the Renaissance, whose leading thinkers sought salvation in the monuments of antiquity; especially in the Roman jurists and the Stoic philosophers. Here the thinkers of the Renaissance found the materials for constructing a concept of natural rights, which they believed would be capable of imposing moral rules. But the nineteenth century applications of the natural rights doctrine had demonstrated that " . . . le droit naturel peut servir à justifier l'arbitraire."⁵⁹ Jurisprudence, Sorel complained, had become the docile

⁵⁸ Ibid. In a footnote Sorel added: "Les chrétiens qui suivaient les principes de la vie spirituelle, s'inspiraient plus directement des moralistes grecs, puisque toute leur philosophie consistait dans un code de l'ascétisme, destiné à rendre l'homme parfait chrétien et à lui procurer la paix parfaite." " . . . morality becomes a jurisprudence of penitential courts, appropriate to conduct the soul on the path of salvation."

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 587. " . . . natural rights can serve to justify the arbitrary."

servant of the passions of the leaders of political parties, with the result that respect for the law had greatly declined. Only recently, Sorel continued, had research been conducted on the relationship between the morals and institutions of various peoples. In this approach, Sorel concluded, resided the possibility of limiting what he called the "fantaisies des docteurs en droit naturel."⁶⁰

Philosophy itself had become a questionable activity in the nineteenth century, according to Sorel, who chided John Stuart Mill for having claimed to produce the canons of induction to govern the methods of rational experiments: ". . . il n'y a rien de plus vain que son 'Organon,' dont jamais aucun physicien n'a tenu compte."⁶¹ Sorel concluded that philosophy must give up its claim to verify the credibility of scientific assumptions, and should instead occupy itself with the principles which science employed--philosophy, he believed, should seek to utilize the teachings which the sciences furnished. Philosophy must renounce the claim to provide solutions, and he added: "Une philosophie ne vaut donc qu'en raison

⁶⁰Ibid. ". . . fantasies of doctors in natural rights."

⁶¹Ibid., p. 589. ". . . there is nothing more vain than his 'Organon' to which no physicist paid attention."

des résultats qu'elle provoque indirectement."⁶² A philosophical system would be admirable even if it contained great holes, contradictions and errors, if it succeeded in suggesting useful tactics which might lead others to what Sorel called "le siège de la réalité." Systems of philosophy noted for their prudent and symmetrical construction, Sorel charged, were often fruitless and obstructed the mind from the discovery of new paths. He concluded "En un mot une philosophie ne vaut seulement que comme moyen de favoriser l'invention."⁶³

The work of Nietzsche, Sorel believed, was of great value. The reader who wished to study the modern world outside of the context of "des idées reçues," Sorel asserted, would find extremely profitable the work of Nietzsche, whom he characterized as one of the most eminent thinkers the European world had produced. Nietzsche was especially gifted from the literary point of view. His " . . . puissance étonnante de pénétration" was beyond the understanding of " . . . contemporains

⁶²Ibid., p. 592. "A philosophy is thus only worth the results it provokes indirectly."

⁶³Ibid., p. 593. "In a word, a philosophy is only worthwhile as a means of favoring invention."

qui ont perdu l'usage du langage métaphysique."⁶⁴ Comparing Nietzsche with Herbert Spencer, whom Sorel noted Gustave Flaubert had praised in 1878 as a thinker with whom Germany had none to compare, Sorel praised Benedetto Croce's judgment that Spencer was the symbol of philosophical mediocrity.⁶⁵

Henri Bergson, according to Sorel, had taken a decisive step for speculative philosophy with his book l'Evolution créatrice.

Bergson had proposed to trace a line of demarcation between the inert and the living. The inorganic world was for Bergson, Sorel reported, the domain of science--the realm of intelligence and matter. But Bergson had contended that if one was not content with simply describing the species and wished to reason on evolution, it was necessary to go beyond that which could be determined scientifically; it was necessary, Sorel added, to invent " . . . un principe dont nous pouvons seulement nous rendre compte en pensant à ce que nous savons de notre conscience; une cause créatrice qui ne

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 65. (This is the continuation of "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie" in Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, Janvier, 1911, pp. 64-99.) " . . . astonishing power of penetration" . . . contemporaries who have lost usage of metaphysical language."

⁶⁵Sorel quoted as follows: Flaubert, Correspondance, t. IV., p. 306 and Benedetto Croce, Il concetto della storia, p. 19, p. 65 in "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie."

se lasse jamais de faire du nouveau en dépit des forces physiques qui travaillent à défaire l'oeuvre de la vie."⁶⁶

The work of Bergson, according to Sorel, opened a new vista for modern philosophy and had thereby affirmed its right to exist.

The nineteenth century, Sorel concluded, had been remarkable for its abundance of scientific discoveries while at the same time it was the century during which had been expressed serious doubts on the reality of science. The mathematicians and the moralists, " . . . ont également écrit pour engager leurs contemporains à n'avoir qu'une confiance médiocre dans les lois que les physiciens énonçaient, à la suite de leurs minutieuses recherches."⁶⁷ The science of nature reduced itself therefore to "une fantaisie" adapted by men of genius to the conditions of experience.⁶⁸ The modern world would

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 67. Sorel referred to Bergson Evolution créatrice, p. 269. " . . . a principle which we can only realize in thinking of what we know of our conscience; a creative cause which never tires itself to make again, in spite of physical forces that work to defeat the work of life."

⁶⁷Sorel, "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie," p. 80. " . . . have written equally to engage their contemporaries in only having a mediocre confidence in the laws that physicists stated following their scrupulously careful research."

⁶⁸In support of this observation, Sorel quoted, in a footnote: "les théories mathématique n'ont pas pour objet de nous révéler la véritable nature des choses. Leur but unique est de coordonner les lois que l'expérience nous fait connaître." H. Poincaré, la science et

commit a grave error, if it were to continue to follow what Sorel called "ces traditions grecques" which supposed that human understanding could separate in things the scientific essences and the accidents. The human organs which play a preponderant role in observation, he wrote: ". . . sont des appareils très chargés de variations accidentelles."⁶⁹ Even the more sophisticated experimental apparatus of the laboratory produced reasonings based upon an "artificial nature" which was forever contained within the limits of the tools of observation. Thus between this artificial nature and "la nature naturelle" there was a lacuna. The idea of unity, Sorel concluded, ". . . que l'on a regardée pendant si longtemps comme étant fondamentale dans la constitution de la science, n'aurait plus de raison d'être."⁷⁰

When the thought of an epoch was as filled with contradictions as was that of the nineteenth century,

l'hypothèse, p. 245. Sorel also quoted from the French translation of Mach, La connaissance et l'erreur, p. 374: "Les lois de la nature sont un produit du besoin psychologique que nous avons de nous retrouver dans la nature, de ne pas rester étranger et embarrassés devant les phénomènes." Both in "Vues sur les problèmes de philosophie," p. 81.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 82. ". . . are instruments very charged with accidental variations."

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 86. ". . . that has been regarded during so long a time as being fundamental in the constitution of science, would no longer have a reason for being."

Sorel continued, it generally occurred that a genius would come forth who could produce an insight which would serve to provide some order to contemporary ideas. Such a genius would allow the old dogmatics to die and would orient itself in new directions. For Georges Sorel, this genius was Henri Bergson, whose book l'Evolution créatrice he believed was comparable in importance to the Critique of Pure Reason in the history of philosophy.⁷¹ Bergson had reproached the Greek philosophers for having had an exaggerated confidence in the power of the individual mind. The idea that philosophy must be a unique, total, global vision, Bergson rejected and insisted instead, according to Sorel, that the enterprise of philosophy " . . . ne pourra plus s'achever tout d'un coup; elle sera nécessairement collective et progressive."⁷² Creative Evolution was, according to Sorel, essentially a statement to modern thinkers to the effect that the principal preoccupation of philosophers " . . . doit être de réfléchir sur les mystères de la vie."⁷³ A consequence of this new attitude of philosophy, Sorel

⁷¹Ibid., p. 89.

⁷²Ibid., p. 98. The reference to Bergson was to l'Evolution créatrice, pp. 208-09. " . . . will no longer be able to suddenly end; it will necessarily be collective and progressive."

⁷³Sorel, "Vues sur les problèmes de philosophie," p. 99. " . . . ought to be to reflect on the mysteries of life."

insisted, would be to draw it closer to art and religion,
and he concluded " . . . nous retrouvons ainsi une des
plus féconds intuitions de Hegel."⁷⁴

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 99. " . . . we thus refind one of
Hegel's most fertile intuitions."

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER V, LE MOUVEMENT SOCIALISTE:

1906 - 1908 AND CHAPTER VI, MARX, DREYFUS,

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY: 1907 - 1910

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO
BENEDETTO CROCE: 1906 - 1910

21 mai 1906

"Je vous écris pour vous recommander une revue socialiste dans laquelle j'écris depuis le commencement de l'année et qui représente en France l'esprit syndicaliste: Le Mouvement socialiste . . . J'y publie les articles sur la violence. Je compte y donner une très longue collaboration et l'ensemble est original . . .

Nos élections sont fanatiquement anticléricales; que va-t-il en sortie?" p. 95

3 août 1906

"Mon but (dans Système historique de Renan) était de montrer que l'histoire des fondateurs est inaccessible et inutile." p. 95

31 décembre 1906

"Ici nous sommes en un temps curieux; à l'étranger on doit de faire une idée, beaucoup plus dramatique qu'il ne convient, de la guerre religieuse de France; en général le clergé voudrait bien ne pas être engagé dans cette guerre et il n'aurait pas mieux demandé qu'à vivre au jour le jour; il ne comprend rien aux résolutions du pape, qui croit à l'héroïsme d'une bourgeoisie catholique infiniment peu héroïque." p. 97

10 janvier 1907

"J'avoue que le 'pragmatisme' m'inspire les plus grands doutes et qu'il a produit (avec Blondel, Laberthonnière, etc.) beaucoup plus de galimatias que toute l'ancienne philosophie." p. 98

15 janvier 1907

"La précision à laquelle je m'efforce de parvenir, au moyen de ma méthode qui met en relief les aspects divers et contradictoires des choses, ne leur convient pas autant que le galimatias. . . . On ne peut atteindre la précision scientifique qu'à la condition de sacrifier beaucoup de questions et qu'en acceptant l'impossibilité

de faire des synthèses; il faut se contenter de vues distincts et partielles--Si vous écrivez sur mes derniers travaux . . . de la grève générale . . . le texte français (est) beaucoup plus développé, qui a paru dans le Mouvement socialiste." p. 98

8 février 1907

" . . . le renouvellement des abonnements n'a pas été bon cette année, par suite de la suavage campagne entreprise contre le Mouvement socialiste par les amis de Jaurès: mes articles sur la violence ont déplu à beaucoup de personnes qui n'aiment pas à voir clair, et qui ont été fâchées d'apprendre que le socialisme n'était pas un genre littéraire." p. 99

6 mai 1907

"Vous avez notamment très bien reconnu quelle est la grande préoccupation de toute ma vie: la genèse historique de la morale.

J'accepte parfaitement les observations que vous faites au sujet de mes théories sur les deux méthodes historiques; je sais bien qu'il serati impossible de trouver jamais l'une ou l'autre méthode exactement appliquée; mais pour expliquer, d'une manière claire, les activités humaines (qui sont toujours bien plus complexes que ne peut dire le langage) il est très utile de former des types parfaitement simples.

. . . Je suis effrayé, quand je lis les livres des prétendus libre-penseurs, de voir qu'ils sont aussi dominés par leur théologie anti-chrétienne, que les prêtres les plus fanatiques peuvent l'être par leur scolastique. Cependant pour traiter convenablement l'histoire du christianisme, il faut faire effort pour s'affranchir de la fureur théologique.

Je crois notamment qu'il est fort inutile de savoir si les grandes miracles, générateurs de grandes institutions, se sont produits ou n'ont existé que dans l'imagination . . . La vie posthume de Jésus peut avoir existé ou n'avoir été qu'une illusion spiritique; qu'importe? je cherche à raconter sans prendre parti sur la réalité de ces faits générateurs; c'est la génération seule qui me paraît appartenir à l'histoire.

. . . Bien évidemment il ne sera jamais possible de s'affranchir d'une certaine conception du monde; si on le faisait, on se rendrait sourd et aveugle; on ne pourrait plus rien comprendre. Je ne crois pas que le physicien lui-même puisse se dispenser d'être quelque peu philosophe . . . Je crois bien en effet que mes analyses se ressentent de ce qu'on nomme souvent l'immanentisme . . . Tous les hommes qui sont très fortement préoccupés de morale réelle et surtout de genèse de la morale ne sont-ils pas, plus ou moins, immanentistes?" pp. 100-01

10 juin 1907

"Le public français est persuadé que Hegel est archimort et enterré; il faudrait le détromper, en montrant qu'il y a des théories hégéliennes qui sont bien vivantes et agissantes." p. 102

23 octobre 1907

"Il me semble que le pape a parfaitement raison de rappeler aux Catholiques que l'Eglise est une 'institution historique,' que ne dépend point du caprice de quelques modernes." p. 104

27 mai 1908

"Il y a quelque chose d'effrayant dans cette idée (de William James) de faire du succès la preuve de la légitimité d'une croyance . . . C'était la sophistique grecque, qui a été le signe (ou peut-être la cause) de la décadence antique." p. 106

24 juin 1908

"Certes Bergson ne sera jamais le philosophe de la bourgeoisie contemporaine; il ne fait rien que celle-ci l'adopte; mais les cartésiens ont beaucoup fait pour se faire adopter. . . . Je me suis, tout à fait, retiré du Mouvement socialiste je n'approuve pas qu'on se transforme en courtisans d'aucune faction . . . il faut beaucoup de courage pour écrire des choses utiles." p. 108

19 septembre 1908

" . . . les écoles . . . recherchent plutôt les formules que des développements de pensée . . . je ne peux être chef d'école . . .
 . . . le clergé, sous l'influence de J. de Maistre, a regardé la science moderne comme une chose dangereuse. De catholiques instruits sont aujourd'hui effrayés de l'ignorance que les thèses de J. de Maistre ont favorisée; ils attaquent ces thèses, en signalant le danger et les tournant au besoin en ridicule." p. 188

24 octobre 1908

" . . . Il me semble de plus et plus certain que l'historien fait beaucoup plus acte de philosophe que de savant; il faut . . . que le philosophe se mêle de discuter les faits et qu'il ne les reçoive pas humblement des mains du savant . . . Si la philosophie est un grand élément des récits historiques, il ne faut donc plus donner ce récit pour la science, et la théologie peut, sans se mettre en conflit avec la science, s'appuyer à une philosophie qui a conduit à un récit particulier aux croyants.

. . . la lecture de l'Evolution créatrice m'a beaucoup éclairé sur ce point. Il me semble qu'il est très important, dans l'intérêt de la science, aussi bien que dans celui de la philosophie, de ne pas confondre science et philosophie comme on l'a fait si longtemps; c'était l'erreur fondamentale du rationalisme." p. 191

4 mai 1909

" . . . je viens de publier sur La révolution dreyfusienne. Je ne crois pas qu'elle fasse beaucoup plaisir aux gens qui détiennent l'opinion et le pouvoir." p. 195

10 mai 1909

"Ma brochure sur l'affaire Dreyfus commence à me valoir beaucoup d'ennuis; parce que je n'ai pas voulu parler de l'innocence ou de la culpabilité de Dreyfus, je trouve beaucoup de gens disposés à me boycotter et à me faire mal; mais je suis habitué à ce traitement et je continue monchemin." p. 195

5 juillet 1909

"Je doute fort qu'il y ait de réels antécédents français pour la pensée de Bergson . . ." p. 196

22 août 1909

"G. Valois est un employé de commerce, dont la valeur littéraire est sérieuse; il s'illusionne certainement sur les conséquences que peuvent-avoir les relations de quelques syndicalistes révolutionnaires avec les royalistes de l'Action française." p. 334

27 novembre 1909

"On va publier incessamment une traduction du Pluralisme de W. James; il paraît que ce livre est bien curieux; il me semble que le 'pluralisme' a pour objet, dans l'esprit de W. James, d'expliquer le mal dans le monde le mal n'est pas très facile à comprendre pour les philosophes à tendances optimistes (comme sont les Anglais et les Américains) . . . D'une manière générale le problème du mal est la pierre d'achoppement de la pensée moderne, qui ne veut pas entendre parler de ce qui supprime son optimisme." p. 336

10 avril 1910

"Je me demande s'il faut regarder comme un simple accident le fait que Hegel n'a eu de vrais successeurs; en serait-ce point que sa philosophie serait le dernier système qui ait pu être construit? On n'avait probablement jamais vu un pareil phénomène; un système tombait vaincu par un autre système; celui de Hegel n'a

pas été remplacé. Est-il vraiment à remplacer? Peut-être Marx aurait vu clair en ne cherchant pas à faire un système et le 'pragmatisme' est évidemment le 'signe' de quelque chose dans l'histoire de la pensée."
p. 338

28 juin 1910

" . . . la signification historique de Hegel est la suppression des anciennes philosophies dogmatiques et l'ouverture d'une nouvelle ère. Ce que vous demandez qu'on retienne dans Hegel c'est un ensemble d'attitudes que l'esprit doit prendre en présence de la réalité pour en acquérir une maîtrise; et il me semble que c'est bien ce qu'il y a eu d'essentiel dans les philosophies; quand elles veulent dogmatiser, elles font une science fallacieuse." p. 341

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER VII

Between 1910 and 1914, Georges Sorel developed his conceptions of grandeur and decadence in human history concluding that decadence is a natural tendency. In this period he also discussed the educational program of Jules Ferry and the waning of the French desire for revenge following the defeat by Germany in 1870. He analyzed a book by Gustave LeBon entitled Opinions and Belief, announced a pragmatic test of "truth" and criticized the "science" of sociology of his day. He then examined the thought of Cournot and advocated an historical reevaluation of rationalism while praising Cournot's concept of "transrationalism." In his essay "Three Problems," he discussed the special role of "aesthetic intuition" in the development of ideas and concluded by praising the work of Henri Bergson and William James as strongly anti-dogmatic.

The appendix provides a comprehensive list of Sorel's writings between 1910 and 1914 including a massive list of book reviews which appeared in the

periodical L'Indépendance 1911 - 1913. His letters to Croce for this period, included in Appendix C, provide additional background for Sorel's pre-war activities.

CHAPTER VII

PRE-WAR REEVALUATIONS: 1910 - 1914

Déclaration De La Cité Française

In 1910, Georges Sorel participated in an abortive attempt to launch a new periodical under the title "la Cité Française." Although publication was never achieved, a declaration of objectives, which was entitled "Déclaration de la Cité Française," provided an insight into the intentions of its founders who were in addition to Georges Sorel, Edouard Berth, Jean Variot, Pierre Gilbert and Georges Valois.¹ The statement called for a free organization of the new periodical and avowed the necessity to liberate itself as well as what it identified as "l'intelligence française" from all ideologies. The founders affirmed their absolute agreement on the need " . . . détruire les institutions démocratique . . . si l'on veut résoudre dans un sens favorable à la civilisation les questions qui se posent dans le monde

¹ Georges Sorel, Edouard Berth, Jean Variot, Pierre Gilbert, and Georges Valois, Déclaration de la "Cité Française," reproduced in Notre Maître, M. Sorel (Paris: Pierre Andreu, Bernard Grasset, 1953), pp. 327-28.

moderne."² Democracy, the declaration continued, was clearly the greatest social peril for all classes and especially for the working classes because of the confusion which it created and for the ensuing opportunity it presented for the exploitation of producers by " . . . bandes de politiciens, associés à des financiers ou dominés par eux."³ This condition required, the statement continued, an organization outside of democratic ideas with the object of awakening in the classes their proper sense of virtue in order that each might fulfill its historical mission. To this end a battle was declared by "la Cité Française" against democratic ideas, against economic systems which ruined the workers and against the work of false historians " . . . qui font de l'histoire une genèse démocratique."⁴

Grandeur Et Décadence

In an essay entitled "Grandeur et décadence" also published in 1910, Georges Sorel affirmed what he believed was the necessary relationship between mediocrity and

²Ibid., p. 327. " . . . to destroy democratic institutions . . . if they want to resolve the questions posed by the modern world in a favorable sense to civilization."

³Ibid. " . . . bands of politicians, associated with or dominated by financiers."

⁴Ibid., p. 328. " . . . who make of history a democratic genesis."

democracy.⁵ Examining his contemporary French milieu, Sorel noted additionally the extent to which the parliamentary Socialists had increased their representation in government, and he associated this increase with what he believed to be an increasing aversion which French society had come to feel for legally conferred rights (le droit). He noted " . . . qu'il existe, à l'heure présente, une dégénérescence générale du droit qui correspond aux nouvelles directions des moeurs."⁶ This moral decline, Sorel attributed to the increasing influence which commercial practices exercised on civil jurisprudence and he wrote: " . . . je trouve dans ce fait une des causes principales qui ont affaibli le sentiment juridique chez nos contemporains."⁷ The rich bourgeoisie, he charged, was losing more and more the sentiment of the principles of civil law.

⁵ Georges Sorel, Grandeur et Décadence, originally written for inclusion in "la Cité Française," the essay was published as an appendix to the third edition of Les illusions du progrès, Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1921), Appendice I, pp. 285-336.

⁶ Ibid., p. 296. " . . . that there exists presently a general degeneration of law corresponding to the new direction of morals."

⁷ Ibid., p. 302. " . . . I find in this fact one of the principle causes which has weakened the judicial sentiment among our contemporaries."

The conception of grandeur and decadence, Sorel continued, corresponded to the ideas of genius and mediocrity, and pertained especially to what he called the " . . . activités de l'esprit libre, c'est-à-dire à l'art, à la religion et à la philosophie."⁸ He believed that chance favored some epochs over others and that humanity was occasionally lifted out of the state of mediocrity only under the energetic pressure of certain constraints, but that it returned naturally to a mediocre state which Sorel believed to be a reflection of "ses propres tendances." This cycle, Sorel designated as the "law of apparent regression." A great error of Marx, Sorel observed " . . . a été de ne pas se rendre compte du pouvoir énorme qui appartient à la médiocrité dans l'histoire."⁹ The present, Sorel asserted, was not favorable to the idea of grandeur but he believed better times would come: " . . . l'histoire nous apprend que la grandeur ne saurait faire indéfiniment à cette partie de l'humanité qui possède les incomparables trésors de la culture classique et de la tradition chrétienne."¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 318. " . . . activities of free spirit, that's to say art, religion and philosophy."

⁹Ibid., p. 332. " . . . was to not realize the enormous power belonging to mediocrity in history."

¹⁰Ibid., p. 335. " . . . history teaches us that grandeur would be indefinitely made by this part of humanity that possesses the incomparable treasures of classical culture and the Christian tradition."

L'Indépendance

On March 1, 1911, Georges Sorel once again found himself a founding member of a committee which had introduced a new periodical. L'Indépendance, which was published the 1st and 15th of each month from March 1, 1911, until February 15, 1913, announced in its premier issue, the intentions of its founders. This statement affirmed that L'Indépendance would not be the instrument of a political party or of any literary group; its language was reminiscent of the declaration of the ill-fated "La Cité Française" of 1910.¹¹ All periods of history had their errors, the thematic statement asserted, but certain aspects of the heritage of the past remained vital for the present, and those who preserved this heritage deserved praise. If France had been able to transmit, the statement continued, ". . . en l'enrichissant, l'héritage classique de la Grèce et de Rome, c'est que, durant plusieurs siècles, ses penseurs, ses poètes, tous ses artistes se sont gardés de confondre le désordre

¹¹L'Indépendance, founded by Émile Baumann, René Benjamin, Vincent D'Indy, Paul Jamot, Ernest Laurent, Emile Moselly, Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, Jean Variot and Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Riviere, March 1, 1911), Numéro I. The thematic statement immediately preceded page 1, and will be hereafter referred to as "Statement" with a page designation of I. Interestingly the cost of L'Indépendance was designated: France, Alsace-Lorraine: 12 francs par an. Etranger: 15 francs. For the committee, the "lost provinces" were placed in a special category.

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avec la liberté, l'originalité avec le manque de goût."¹²
L'Indépendance was envisioned as an instrument " . . .
 capables de lutter contre une telle aberration."¹³ To
 neglect or regret the past, the statement concluded
 " . . . sont également stériles, mais la tradition, loin
 d'être une entrave, est le point d'appui nécessaire qui
 assure les élans les plus hardis."¹⁴ All members of the
 founding committee signed the statement whose publication
 signaled the commencement of a two-year life-span for
L'Indépendance, during which time its principle con-
 tributor was Georges Sorel.¹⁵

¹²"Statement," p. I. " . . . while enriching it, the classical heritage of Greece and Rome, lasting several centuries, it is because its thinkers, poets, all of its artists kept themselves from confusing disorder with liberty, originality with lack of taste."

¹³Ibid. " . . . capable to struggle against such an aberration."

¹⁴Ibid. The statement promised to its future contributors an independence of expression, and insisted that L'Indépendance "ne leur demandera ni sacrifice, ni concession qui diminue leur personnalité." " . . . is equally sterile, but tradition, far from being a shackle, is the necessary point of support that assures the most hardy outbursts."

¹⁵See Appendix A for a complete list of the essays submitted by Georges Sorel to L'Indépendance 1911 - 1913, and Appendix B for a list of book reviews which he submitted.

Le Monument De Jules Ferry

The opening essay of the March 1, 1911, inaugural issue of L'Indépendance was entitled "le monument de Jules Ferry" by Georges Sorel. The picture of Jules Ferry which Sorel presented suggested that Ferry was one of the last representatives of the old provincial bourgeoisie--a class which Sorel characterized as being " . . . pleine d'orgueil . . . se regardait comme appelée à utiliser les institutions créées par la monarchie; elle croyait avoir droit au pouvoir en raison d'une sorte de 'droit divin de l'intelligence.'"¹⁶ The colonial policy with which Ferry had been associated, Sorel believed, had not produced the results which were expected of it, yet he noted no political party had been able to decide to abandon even a fragment of the empire. The educational program of Ferry, Sorel continued, had results quite different from what its promoters had planned. The definitive establishment of the republican regime, Sorel noted, coincided with the desire on the part of this newly established Republic " . . . imiter . . . le système d'éducation primaire obligatoire . . . en Allemagne . . . de développer dans les classes

¹⁶ Georges Sorel, "le Monument de Jules Ferry," L'Indépendance (March 1, 1911), p. 3. " . . . full of pride . . . seeing itself called to utilize the institutions created by the monarchy; it believed it had the right to power by reason of a sort of divine right of intelligence."

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inférieur de la population un profond sentiment de respect pour le souverain."¹⁷ Jules Ferry, according to Sorel, sincerely wanted the priests and the lay teachers to cooperate in the realm of popular education--a cooperation which, if it had succeeded, Sorel insisted, would have protected the republican bourgeoisie from the more radical politicians.¹⁸ But the battle between the church and the state produced problems which Sorel believed Jules Ferry did not fully comprehend. Thus Ferry's legislation and the intransigence of the Catholics, Sorel noted, led to open conflict. In this confrontation, Sorel wrote, "Ferry manquait totalement de souplesse; il voulut effrayer ses adversaires et se donna le vilain rôle de persécuter, bien qu'il ait toujours affirmé qu'il ne voulait pas persécuter la religion."¹⁹ From this experience, Sorel concluded that the bourgeoisie could not be anticlerical with impunity.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 14. ". . . to imitate the primary obligatory education system . . . in Germany . . . to develop in the inferior classes of the population a profound feeling of respect for the sovereign power."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 15. In this evaluation of Ferry's desire for cooperation, Sorel followed the opinion of Gabriel Hanotaux who advanced the idea in Histoire de la France contemporaine, Tome IV, pp. 599, 613.

¹⁹Sorel, "le Monument," p. 15. "Ferry totally lacked flexibility; he wished to frighten his adversaries and gave himself the villain role of persecutor, although he had always affirmed that he did not want to persecute religion."

L'Abandon De La Revanche

On the question of the existence of the desire for revenge in France toward Germany, Sorel wrote an essay entitled "L'abandon de la revanche" which appeared in the April 1, 1911, issue of L'Indépendance. The French elections of 1877, he noted, had resulted in a plebecite against revenge.²⁰ Although he believed that the French were always moved by what he called "la musique de l'éloquence patriotique," Sorel concluded " . . . ils désirent avec ardeur qu'on leur permette de demeurer pacifiques spectateurs des événements qui se produisent dans le monde."²¹ Both the fall of Boulangerism and the victory of the Dreyfusards he attributed, in large part, to the power of these sentiments. The masses, he wrote, " . . . ont abandonné les directeurs des agitations nationalistes quand elles ont soupçonné qu'on les menait à la revanche."²² The explanation of this disposition, Sorel found in Renan's observation that, "uniquely pre-occupied with well-being, France had become the most

²⁰ Georges Sorel, "L'abandon de la revanche," L'Indépendance (April 1, 1911), p. 90.

²¹ Ibid. " . . . they desire with ardor that they be permitted to remain pacifist bystanders to events produced in the world."

²² Ibid., p. 91. " . . . abandoned the directors of nationalist agitations when they suspected that they were led in revenge."

pacific country in the world."²³ The search for material prosperity, Sorel believed, agreeing with Renan, had led France henceforth to adapt itself to a "fundamental mediocrity," which he characterized as being " . . . sans originalité, ni hardiness."²⁴

Sur La Magie Moderne

On September 1, 1911, Georges Sorel published an essay entitled "Sur la magie moderne" in which he proposed to examine a newly published book by Gustave LeBon: Les opinions et les croyances.²⁵ LeBon had written, according to Sorel, that modern credulity was as great as it had been in the ancient world, and further that observations of history as well as psychology convinced him that " . . . l'humanité est condamnée à subir éternellement la dualité de la croyance et de la connaissance."²⁶ Sorel affirmed that he regarded this opinion

²³ Ibid. Sorel referenced Renan, Réforme intellectuelle et morale, p. 23.

²⁴ Ibid. Renan, pp. 25,26.

²⁵ Georges Sorel, "Sur la magie moderne," L'Indépendance (September 1, 1911). The work examined by Sorel was Les opinions et les croyances, Gustave LeBon (Paris: Flammarion, 1911).

²⁶ Sorel quoted from Les opinions et les croyances, pp. 328-29, in "Sur la magie moderne," p. 4. " . . . humanity is condemned to eternally submit to the duality of belief and knowledge."

as perfectly correct, and noted the essentially magical forms in political, economic and social life, but the question, he insisted " . . . est de savoir si nous sommes désarmes devant cette fatalité."²⁷ It was obvious to Sorel that a more complete development of rationalism could not eliminate this aspect of human consciousness and he chided the "fallacieuse métaphysique" of the eighteenth century for having believed that all the illusions of past civilizations would vanish before the progress of enlightenment--ideas which he noted " . . . sont encore enseignées aux primaires au nom de la Sorbonne."²⁸ Sorel suggested this condition of duality, while potentially dangerous, could point the way to the development of mentally more satisfying constructions by recognizing the need for what he called "des racines puissantes dans le coeur."²⁹ Such a method, Sorel believed, had been utilized in Christianity. By meditating on the means which Christianity employed to

²⁷ Ibid. " . . . is to know if we are disarmed before this fatality."

²⁸ Ibid., p. 3. " . . . are still taught in the primary schools in the name of the Sorbonne."

²⁹ Ibid., p. 4. Sorel wrote: " . . . mais peut-être pourrait-on engloutir, en quelque sort, ces tendances funestes, en accaparant toute la conscience au profit de constructions satisfaisantes pour l'esprit et ayant des racines puissantes dans le coeur." " . . . powerful roots in the heart."

dominate natural tendencies, Sorel believed, one could discover the extent to which it benefited from what he called these "dispositions fondamentales." Science itself, Sorel concluded, did not derive certainty from logic, but from the experimental mechanism it had at its disposal, and he agreed with LeBon who had suggested the precarious nature of this certainty: "Toute leur instrumentation scientifique sert seulement à leur donner à certaines illusions, dont les fideles eux-mêmes n'étaient pas toujours très sûrs, une apparence de certitude, qu'elles n'auraient jamais acquise autrement."³⁰

Si Les Dogmes Evoluent

The spectacle of the battle between the Christian church and the French state caused Sorel to speculate in an article entitled "Si les dogmes évoluent," (L'Indépendance, September 15, 1911) " . . . que la ruine des croyances chrétiennes laisse l'Européen du XXe siècle sans religion."³¹ Sorel charged that his contemporary Republicans were engaged in an effort to discredit Christianity

³⁰ Sorel quoted from Les opinions et les croyances, pp. 282-83, in "Sur la magie moderne," p. 7. "All their scientific instrumentation only served to give them certain illusions, of which the faithful themselves were not always very sure, an appearance of certainty that they otherwise would never acquire."

³¹ Georges Sorel, "Si les dogmes évoluent," L'Indépendance (September 15, 1911), p. 34. " . . . that the ruin of Christian beliefs left the European of the twentieth century without religion."

using their control of education as the principle means of attack. Their approach at the primary level of education, Sorel charged, was to simply teach that science had rendered impossible the belief in the supernatural. To convince the university students, he continued, they used a more serious argument: ". . . c'est l'histoire qui devra servir en Sorbonne à ruiner l'armature idéologique de la religion."³² In spite of the disdain for tradition which the Republican writers against Christianity showed, Sorel insisted that a new philosophical conception had posed a rule which stated that ". . . quand il existe un tradition ancienne, féconde en grande résultats et illustrée par des hommes de génie, ses affirmations constituent, pour le moins, des 'vérités pragmatiques', que l'intelligence a le devoir de toujours contrôler, mais qu'on ne saurait rejeter sous le seul prétexte qu'il n'en est pas donné de démonstrations 'scientifiques.'"³³

³²Ibid. ". . . it is history which should serve the Sorbonne to ruin the ideological armor of religion."

³³Ibid., p. 38. ". . . when there exists an ancient tradition, rich in great results, and illustrated by men of genius, its affirmations constitute, at the least, pragmatic truths, that intelligence has the duty to always control but that we could not reject under the sole pretext that it had not given scientific demonstrations of them."

Un Critique Des Sociologues

In the category of writers defined by Sorel as "faithful representatives of that rationalism which has so long troubled French brains,"³⁴ Sorel included certain sociologists whose work formed the subject of his essay entitled "Un critique des sociologues," (L'Indépendance, October 1, 1911). Lévy-Bruhl, who was in 1911 a professor at the Sorbonne, had claimed, according to Sorel, that all moral philosophy was a sham and that the time had come to construct a rational morality which would eliminate obscurity and lead to human happiness. Had Lévy-Bruhl read Aristotle, Sorel charged, ". . . il ne parlerait point, avec tant d'assurance, d'une science des moeurs, alors qu'il n'en peut formuler aucune proposition."³⁵ Even Durkheim, whom Sorel admired, had never, he charged, succeeded in defining what he meant by society and Sorel concluded by chiding sociologists who spoke of "their

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Georges Sorel, "Un critique des Sociologues," L'Indépendance (October 1, 1911), p. 79. Sorel wrote: "Lévy-Bruhl excelle dans l'art de rendre la réalité difficilement saisissable aux gens qui sont dénués d'un sens critique puissant," p. 74. ". . . he would not talk with so much assurance of a science of morals when he is able to formulate no proposition from it."

science" which he believed was based on " . . . des définitions vague de manière à pouvoir créer un monde imaginaire."³⁶

A La Mémoire De Cournot

On October 15, 1911, Sorel dedicated an essay to the memory of Cournot, whom he believed to be an independent thinker whose teachings were " . . . beaucoup plus utiles que ceux d'aucun autre philosophe français du XIXe siècle."³⁷ Cournot, Sorel noted, had rejected the dogmatic philosophies of such thinkers as Renouvier and Comte, and Sorel emphasized that " . . . aujourd'hui, la nullité du dogmatisme devient tous les jours plus évidente."³⁸ Sorel found particularly valuable a book which Cournot had completed at the age of 74 entitled Matérialisme, vitalisme, rationalisme. This book provided a summary of Cournot's teachings and included

³⁶Ibid., p. 77. Writing of Durkheim, Sorel noted: "Son réalisme socail est comme une de ces plantes stérilisées, qu'il est devenu de mode de placer dans les appartements manquant d'air et de lumière," p. 84. " . . . vague definitions in a manner to be able to create an imaginary world."

³⁷Georges Sorel, "A la mémoire de Cournot," L'Indépendance (October 15, 1911), p. 97. " . . . much more useful than those of any other nineteenth century French philosopher."

³⁸Ibid., p. 100. " . . . today the nullity of dogmatism becomes more evident everyday."

entirely new ideas which according to Sorel were of the highest importance on the subject of "transrationalisme." Cournot used this term, Sorel noted, ". . . pour remplacer le terme mysticisme pris souvent dans un sens préjoratif."³⁹ The champions of experimental science who had failed to accord sufficient attention to experience, Sorel believed, posed a great danger for the progress of human understanding. The work of Cournot, Sorel insisted, took account of the realities contained in nature and in history and rejected the categories of "unity" and "infinity" which Cournot believed were merely "cartes métaphysiques dressées avec symètre et élégance."⁴⁰ A study of human understanding, Sorel concluded, demonstrated to Cournot that these categories were subject to continuous modification ". . . aux divers étages du système des connaissances humaines."⁴¹ Thus the mind, Sorel believed, constructed special systems for each genre of knowledge.

³⁹Ibid., p. 101. Sorel referenced Cournot, Matérialisme, vitalisme, rationalisme, p. 384. ". . . in order to replace the term mysticism often taken in a pejorative sense."

⁴⁰Sorel, "A La mémoire de Cournot," p. 103. ". . . metaphysical maps dressed with symmetry and elegance."

⁴¹Ibid., p. 104. ". . . in diverse stages of the system of human knowledge."

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Based on his study of Cournot, Sorel concluded that a satisfying critique of human understanding relied upon a critique of rationalism by historians: "Une critique satisfaisante de la connaissance ne pouvait être tentée avant que le prestige ancien du rationalisme n'eût été abaissé . . . par les historiens."⁴² This conclusion had also been reached by Cournot, according to Sorel, who had believed this critique would entail the study of the philosophy of languages, and all the religious, political and judicial institutions by which human life manifested itself. This would occur, according to Cournot, " . . . quand l'école historique a prévalu sur les écoles de théoriciens."⁴³ Cournot did not attempt to formulate a new morality for his contemporaries, Sorel noted, because he believed " . . . ce n'est que par la culture sociale et la tradition historique que se développent . . . les facultés supérieurs de l'homme."⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., p. 111. "A satisfying critique of knowledge was not able to be tried before the former prestige of rationalism had been lowered . . . by historians."

⁴³Ibid. Sorel quoted Cournot, Materialisme, p. 592. " . . . when the historical school prevailed over schools of theorists."

⁴⁴Sorel, "A La mémoire de Cournot," p. 112. Chiding the sociologists, Sorel added: "Cournot jugeait inutile de suivre les spéculations des moralistes qui ont disserté sur l'homme abstrait," p. 111. " . . . it is only by social culture and historical tradition that the superior faculties of man develop."

Sorel concluded his essay by suggesting a union between reason and experience which he designated by the term "pragmatisme."⁴⁵ The pragmatically constructed systems, Sorel believed, had shown themselves in the history of science to be stable even in the face of serious criticisms, because the innovators " . . . ne peuvent les faire disparaître qu'en proposant des systèmes manifestement beaucoup plus avantageux."⁴⁶ This apparent conservatism led Sorel to the speculation that " . . . il existe donc dans la science une présomption historique fort analogue aux présomptions du droit."⁴⁷

Trois Problèmes

In an essay entitled "Trois problèmes" (L'Indépendance, December 1, 1911) which was devoted to an analysis of Daniel Halévy's Luttes et problèmes: Apologie pour notre passé (Marcel Rivière, Paris, 1911), Georges Sorel stated his conviction that the duty of all honest men,

⁴⁵Sorel in a footnote wrote: "Je crois que William James n'aurait pas contesté le droit que je prends ici de donner au mot pragmatisme un sens beaucoup plus noble que celui que lui donne l'usage." Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 114. " . . . are only able to make them disappear in proposing systems manifestly much more advantageous."

⁴⁷Ibid. Cournot, Sorel added, holds "une place éminente parmi les penseurs qui ont cherché à régénérer la philosophie par la réflexion historique." " . . . there exists, thus, in science a strong historic presumption analogous to presumptions of law."

regardless of party was " . . . de travailler à l'éducation des masses."⁴⁸ But regular discourse and argumentation was, Sorel believed, almost powerless to liberate minds which had come under the influence of superficial conceptions which appeared to be sound but which were in fact unfounded. This intellectual slavery could only be destroyed by employing a procedure capable of popularizing a powerful experience in which " . . . la réalité se manifesterait en opposition absolue avec les abstractions que les masses acceptent comme vérités incontestables."⁴⁹

Such a work had been produced by Thomas More whose Utopia, Sorel believed, affirmed the triumph of the aesthetic intuition over what he called "les mécanismes scolastiques." Such a procedure would merit complete admiration, Sorel added, " . . . s'il a mis en bonne lumière le mode d'action de quelques-unes de ces forces cachées dont n'aiment guère s'occuper les gens qui redoutent les criailleries des rhéteurs à la mode."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Georges Sorel, "Trois problèmes," L'Indépendance (December 1 and December 15, 1911), p. 262. " . . . to work to educate the masses."

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 270. " . . . reality manifests itself in absolute opposition to the abstractions that the masses accept as uncontested truths."

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 271. " . . . if it put in a good light the mode of action of some these hidden forces which people scarcely like to be occupied with who fear the cries of popular rhetor."

La Rivolta Ideale

The Italian writer, Alfredo Oriani, whom both Sorel and Croce admired as a romantic novelist and profound social philosopher, became the subject of Sorel's essay entitled "La rivolta ideale" (L'Indépendance, April 15, 1912). Like Thomas More, Sorel believed that Oriani combined an aesthetic intuition with philosophic insight. His work, Sorel noted: ". . . été assez clairvoyant pour prévoir le désastre des scientifiques et a contribué à maintenir la noble tradition hégélienne."⁵¹ The Hegelian philosophy, Sorel believed, had been among the most fecund influences on nineteenth century thought but he warned against what he believed was the sterile and abstract approach to Hegelian ideas adopted by the contemporary university professors, whom he charged were ". . . beaucoup trop habitués à réduire l'histoire des idées à des rapprochements d'abstractions infiniment ténues."⁵² The true successors of Hegel, Sorel believed,

⁵¹ Georges Sorel, "La rivolta ideale," L'Indépendance (April 15, 1912), p. 166. Croce had written favorably of Oriani in la Critica, January 20, 1909. Oriani (1852-1909) who between 1876 - 1908 published 13 novels, a book of poetry, a drama, and 5 histories, had authored la rivolta ideale whose 1908 edition was being used by Sorel in his essay. ". . . was clear enough to foresee the disaster of scientists and contributed to the maintenance of the noble hegelian tradition."

⁵² Sorel, "La rivolta ideale," p. 167. ". . . much more used to reducing the history of ideas to reconciliations of infinitely held abstractions."

interested themselves little in " . . . la scolastique compliquée, souvent arbitraire, parfois même puérole de 'ce grand barbare!'"⁵³ They sought instead, Sorel insisted, the prodigious intuitions which abounded in his work. Alfredo Oriani, according to Sorel, sought to penetrate reality by means of intuitions suggested to him by a study of the works of Hegel. From this study, Oriani concluded that the philosophy of history had as much importance for the nineteenth century as the astronomy of Copernicus had had for the opening of the modern era. Influenced by Vico, Sorel noted, Oriani believed that mankind moved fatally toward a decomposition which could be a prelude to barbarism or renaissance. In this decomposition, Oriani hoped for " . . . la véritable révolution populaire" and to this end " . . . il enseigne aux hommes que les grands peuples sont appelés à subir de très sanglants sacrifices pour accomplir la mission que l'histoire leur a confiée."⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid. " . . . complicated scholastic, often arbitrary sometimes even puerile of 'this great barbarian.'"

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 169. " . . . the true popular revolution" " . . . he taught men that the great people are called to submit to very bloody sacrifices in order to accomplish the mission history confided in them."

Les Méfaits Des Intellectuels

In January, 1914, Georges Sorel wrote a letter to Edouard Berth, which became the preface to a book by Berth entitled Les Méfaits des Intellectuels. In this letter, Sorel complained of the unwillingness of those he called "nos universitaires" who had, he observed, failed to appreciate the importance of Henri Bergson and William James.⁵⁵ The plight of the philosopher, Sorel added, was often incomprehensible because " . . . son âme n'est point sensible aux illusions des succès politiques, littéraires ou mondains."⁵⁶ But the study of the past revealed, Sorel asserted, that without the brilliance of metaphysics, the proudest creations of the present culture would not exist. The role of metaphysics, which Sorel feared had been neglected by an epoch which had produced the positivism of August Comte, was to expand human understanding and to produce the conditions in which " . . . un état métaphysique a pris la place d'un

⁵⁵Edouard Berth, Les Méfaits des Intellectuels (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1926), 2nd éd. With an introductory preface by Georges Sorel, Barth's work bore the following dedication: "A mon maître Georges Sorel en témoignage de ma profonde gratitude intellectuelle."

⁵⁶Ibid., p. V. Sorel noted that Anatole France had condemned Bergson " . . . comme un corrupteur des nouvelles générations," p. III. " . . . his soul is not sensitive to illusions of political, literary or worldly success."

état positiviste."⁵⁷ But the immediate present was, for Sorel, discouraging: ". . . le sol de l'histoire contemporaine est jonché de débris de vanités."⁵⁸

Sorel believed that a schism had occurred between the manner of thinking which dominated the nineteenth century--a century which was, he wrote: ". . . tyrannisé par le dogmatisme de scientifiques," and the approach toward understanding represented by the genius of Pascal.⁵⁹ These two realms which Sorel conceptualized as material and moral, had in the past, he believed, been represented by the conflict between science and religion. Philosophy would henceforth be dominated, Sorel believed, by the question of how the two realms could coexist. The answer to this question, Sorel believed, could be approached through the realization that ". . . les deux absolus présentent entre eux de remarquables analogies."⁶⁰ In

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. VII. ". . . a metaphysical state took the place of a positivist state."

⁵⁸ Ibid. ". . . the ground of contemporary history is scattered with debris of vanities."

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. VIII. Sorel employed the "image" of Pascal because he believed "le génie de Pascal . . . marque d'une image psychologique, plus clairement qu'on ne pourrait le faire par n'importe quelle dissertation abstraite, la scission que nous voyons se produire . . ." ". . . tyrannized by the dogmatism of scientists."

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. XIII. ". . . the two absolutes present remarkable analogies between them."

the course of the development of science and religion and law (which Sorel added as "un terme moyen entre la science et la théologie"), Sorel wrote " . . . les considérations esthétiques de simplicité, de convenance, d'harmonie ayant eu une influence très notable sur le choix des solutions adoptées."⁶¹

Bergson, Sorel continued, had demarked a line "entre l'inerte et le vivant" and had attributed the inert realm to logic, while recommending " . . . de n'accorder qu'une valeur métaphorique aux déductions qui portent sur l'autre domaine."⁶² All the research made on the origins of Christianity, Sorel added, had shown that history could not attain a dogmatic statement of the facts which took place and this state of knowledge did not permit the denial of " . . . la possibilité de la création, des miracles ou des expériences mystiques."⁶³ Sorel concluded his preface with the prediction that the

⁶¹Ibid., XVII. " . . . aesthetic considerations of simplicity, convenience, harmony having had a very notable influence on the choice of adopted solutions."

⁶²Ibid., XVIII, XIX. Sorel quoted Bergson, Evolution créatrice, pp. 216, 231-32. " . . . to accord only a metaphorical value to deductions that bear on the other domain."

⁶³Berth, les Méfaits des Intellectuelles, p. xx. " . . . the possibility of creation, miracles or mystic experiences."

anti-dogmatics of Pascal reinforced by Bergson would produce a new generation " . . . débarassée, . . . des fantômes construits par les philosophies intellectualistes depuis Descartes."⁶⁴

⁶⁴Ibid., XXXVII. " . . . free of phantoms constructed by intellectual philosophers since Descartes."

APPENDIX A

L'INDÉPENDANCE, MARCEL RIVIERE ET CIE PARIS, 1911 - 1913
ESSAYS BY GEORGES SOREL

Mars-Août 1911

- "le Monument de Jules Ferry," pp. 1-28
- "L'abandon de la revanche," pp. 71-107
- "lyripipii Sorbonici moralisationes," pp. 111-50
- "Responsabilités de 1870," pp. 167-90
- "L'otage de Paul Claudel," pp. 391-436

Septembre 1911 - Février 1912

- "Sur la magie moderne," pp. 1-11
- "Si les dogmes évoluent," pp. 33-70
- "Un critique des sociologues," pp. 73-92
- "A la mémoire de Cournot," pp. 97-134
- "Trois problèmes," pp. 221-40
- "Trois problèmes," (fin) pp. 261-92
- "Urbain Gohier," pp. 305-28

Mars-Août 1912

- "D'un écrivain prolétaire," pp. 19-37
- "la rivolta ideale," pp. 161-78
- "Quelques prétentions juives," pp. 217-37
- "Quelques prétentions juives" (suite), pp. 277-96
- "Quelques prétentions juives" (fin), pp. 317-37

Octobre 1912 - Février 1913

- "Aux temps dreyfusiens," pp. 29-57

APPENDIX B

L'INDÉPENDANCE 1911 - 1913
BOOK REVIEWS SUBMITTED BY GEORGES SOREL WITH
SELECTED EXCERPTS OF SOREL'S COMMENTS

Mars - Août 1911..

Le mythe vertuiste et la littérature immorale, Vilfredo Pareto

"Les philosophes politiques actuels sont très effrayés des dangers que court la démocratie; mais ils ne sont pas de force à approfondir les problèmes qu'ils se posent; les plus savants d'entre eux sentent vaguement que les moeurs des démocraties devraient quelque peu rappeler celle des communautés protestantes qui servirent de modèles aux premiers théoriciens du droit public moderne." p. 29

Antipragmatisme, Albert Schinz

"Dès qu'on ne tient plus compte de ces caractères essentiels, on s'expose à faire du pragmatisme un grand danger: soit qu'on le transforme en dogme de l'infailibilité démocratique, soit qu'on y voie une apologie du succès." p. 30

Le Christianisme à la croisée des chemins, Georges Tyrrel

Impérialisme ancien et moderne, Lord Cromer

Entre deux servitudes, Jean Bourdeau

L'interprétation économique de l'histoire, Edwin Seligman

Ce qui est vivant et ce qui est mort dans la philosophie de Hegel, Benedetto Croce

"Presque tout le monde croit chez nous que la philosophie de Hegel n'existe plus que dans les livres d'histoire, . . . c'est une grave erreur." p. 33

Quelques remarques sur l'Orpheus de M. Salomon Rernach, R.P.M.S. Lagrange

Harnack et le miracle, Hermann van Laak

La science des religions et la foi chrétienne, J. Bricout

Pragmatisme, modernisme, protestantisme, Albert Leclère

". . . l'influence incontestable des tendances pragmatiques dans la pensée contemporaine . . . je ne

peux la regarder comme due aux écrits de Guyan, de Secrétan, de Blondel ou d'autres génies du bavardage philosophique; je la rattache aux préoccupations historiques que Hegel a inspirées au XIXe siècle. Je dirai donc pour définir les tendances pragmatiques: certaines choses doivent être appelées vraies, parce que leur fécondité a été révélée par le développement historique." p. 108

Coopération et socialisme en Angleterre, Barrault et Alfassa

Psychologie de l'éducation, Gustave Le Bon

Les jardins de l'histoire, Emile Gebhart

La vieille église, Emile Gebhart

La philosophie de M. Bergson, Pierre Lasserre

"Voici comment je résume l'Evolution créatrice. Le transformisme, enseigné aujourd'hui par les naturalistes, est inintelligible si on n'admet pas que du surnaturel accompagne la vie; dans l'animal, l'instinct a quelque chose de divin; l'intelligence humaine s'est formée au cours de la fabrication des instruments de travail, en sorte que l'homme est devenu géomètre parce qu'il était artisan. Le vrai domaine de l'intelligence est l'étude des corps bruts; dans ce domaine, elle est souveraine. . . . Quand on sort de ce domaine; il faut prendre beaucoup de précautions en appliquant les procédés du raisonnement scientifique, parce que la science n'est plus adéquate à la réalité." pp. 191-92

Hyponotisme et suggestion, César Lombroso

Les anciennes démocraties des Pays-Bas, Henri Pirenne

L'Angleterre moderne. Son évolution, Louis Cazamian

Souvenirs d'un vieil Athénien, Emile Gebhart

Saints d'autrefois, Newman

Praeterita. Souvenirs de jeunesse, Ruskin

Louis II de Bavière, Jacques Bainville

Les grands courants de la pensée contemporaine, Roudolf Euchen

" . . . quand on considère l'ensemble d'un long passé, chez les grands peuples, on trouve les choses achevées, la science, l'histoire, le déterminisme; mais quand on se tourne vers l'avenir, on trouve la vie, l'imagination, le mythe, la liberté." p. 231

Rome et le clergé français sous la Constituante, Albert Mathiez

L'erreur primaire, Maze-Sencier

Nouvelles études anglaises, André Chevrillon

" . . . il me semble qu'il est nécessaire d'employer des expositions mythologiques pour parler correctement

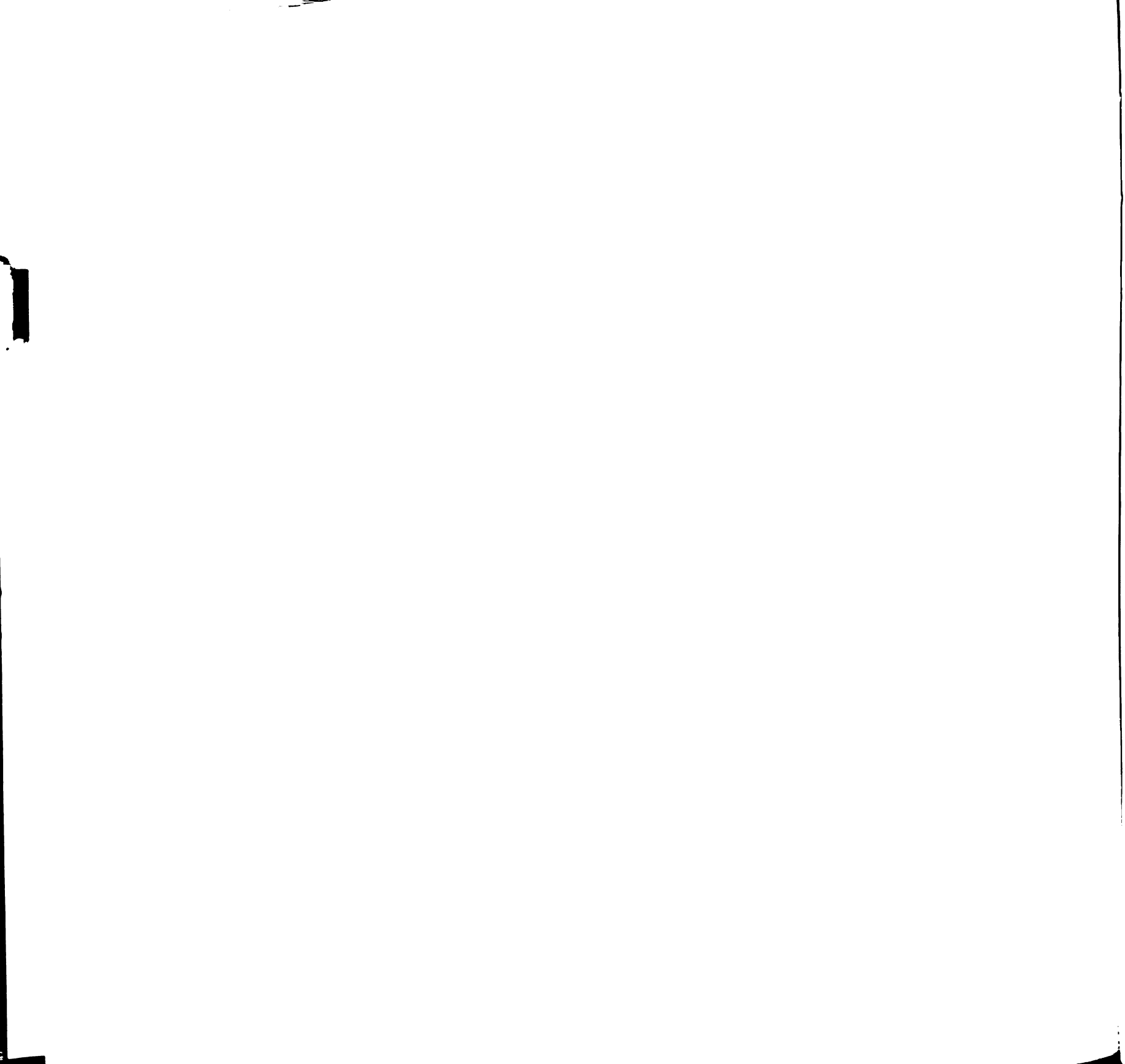
de la société, de la patrie, de la famille, des sanctions de la vie; les idéologues commettent un étrange contresens lorsqu'ils réduisent ces choses à des abstractions scolastiques . . . " p. 338

Ce que mes yeux ont vu, Arthur Meyer
La pensée contemporaine, Paul Gaultier
Barbey d'Aurevilly, Ernest Seillière
Histoire partielle et histoire vraie, Jean Guiraud
L'Angleterre d'Edouard VII, Augustin Filon
la catholicisme libéral, Dom Besse
Un prêtre marie, Albert Rontu
La poésie et le symbolisme dans l'histoire des institutions humaines, Jacques Flach

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Pour le droit naturel, G. Platon
L'Etat et ses agents, Pierre Harmignie
Armand Carrel et Emile de Girardin, Louis Fiaux
L'Empire libéral, Emile Olliver
Les mystiques du neo-romantisme, Ernest Seillière
Archives et papiers personnels de Crispi, traduction de Mme. Jean Carrère
Lé réalisme de Bouald, Leon de Montesquiou
Etude sur le XVIII siècle, Ferdinand Brunetière
L'Afrique noire, Capitaine O. Meynier
William James, Emile Boutroux
Positivisme et catholicisme, Laberthonnière
Domination et colonisation, Jules Harman
Le régionalisme, Charles-Brun
De Panurge à Sancho Panca, Emile Gebhart
 "Il est fort difficile de faire rire un monde civilisé, aussi les gens qui parviennent à le faire rire obtiennent-ils une immense réputation . . . on a peut-être le droit de penser qu'il faut plus de génie pour produire un chef-d'oeuvre grotesque que pour produire un chef-d'oeuvre sérieux." p. 165

les maîtres de l'heure, Victor Giraud
Pages choisies des mémoires d'Outre-Tombe, Victor Giraud
A propos de l'histoire des religions, Alfred Loisy
Lettres de combat, Ferdinand Brunetière
Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus, Tome VII, Joseph Reinach
Lettres de jeunesse, Charles-Louis Philippe
A l'enseigne de l'Idéal. Quarante-cinq ans de ma vie, Louise de Prusse, princesse Antoine Radziwill
Les idées révolutionnaires dans les campagnes du Bourbonnais, Léopold Bernard
Les sciences et les humanités, Henri Poincaré
Lettres inédites de Proudhon à Gustave Chaudey et à divers Comtois
Les odes de Salomon, Labourt et Batiffol



Mars-Août 1912

le Nouveau Testament dans l'Eglise chrétienne, E.

Jacquier

Renouvier, P. Archimbault

"Tout ce que j'ai lu de Renouvier m'a donné l'opinion que c'était un excellent primaire, dont l'intelligence avait été un peu troublée par une éducation mathématique trop forte pour lui: il trouva de la philosophie dans Victor Hugo." p. 39

La question bretonne, Comte de lantivy-Trédion

L'impérialisme britannique, John Bridge

Gobel, Gustave Gautherot

Pages choisies de Jules Lemaître, André du Fresnoy

"En publiant ce florilège l'Action française a évidemment voulu montrer, par l'exemple de Jules Lemaître, quelle puissante attraction exerce l'idée royaliste sur les hommes . . . les jeunes amis de Charles Maurras n'ont pas l'air de s'apercevoir que leur mouvement pourrait bien servir à préparer une restauration bonapartiste, s'ils ne prennent pas quelques précautions." p. 42

Jésus et les apôtres, C. Piepenbring

Beethoven, Vincent d'Indy

"Les artistes, comme tous les inventeurs, sont obligés de tenter beaucoup d'essais hasardeux avant de trouver la voie qui conduit à une réalité ayant une valeur esthétique." p. 89

Etudes de critique et d'histoire religieuse, E. Vacandard

Jean Chapelain, Georges Collas

Le miroir de la perfection du bienheureux Francois

d'Assise, Orere Leon

les sciences de la nature au XVIII siècle, D. Mornet

Contes et fantaisies, Emile Gebhart

Quételet, statisticien et sociologue, Joseph Lottin

". . . aujourd'hui on a peine à comprendre comment Durkehim peut appeler pathologique ce qui s'eloigne de la moyenne." p. 146

En flânant la Provence, André Hallays

Histoire des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne, Abbé

Tixeront

Nouvelles orientations de la morale, F. Palhoriès

"Aussi beaucoup de personnes raisonnables estiment qu'il conviendrait de modifier certaines règles juridiques relatives à la condition de la femme, pour les mettre mieux en rapport avec les conditions de la vie actuelle; mais ces personnes sont abusivement qualifiées de 'feministes,' car le vrai 'féministe' se propose de développer la liberté des relations sexuelles." p. 251

Il materialismo storico in Frederico Engels, Rodolfo Mondolfo

Bersot et ses amis, Gelix Hémon

Histoire de la Commune de 1871, Edmond Lepelletier

Les notes d'un voyage en Grèce, Charles Demaurge

" . . . une métaphysique n'est point faite pour alimenter les harangues du dialecticien, mais pour diriger nos travaux de recherche."

Mémoires sur les sciences occultes, Schopenhauer

le gouvernement de Pie X, Aventino

Michel Bakounine, Marc de Preaudan

la philosophie de M. Henri Bergson, René Gillouin

Nouvelles études sur Chateaubriand, Victor Giraud

L'objet intégral de l'apologétique, P. A. de Poulpiquet

Newmann catholique, Paul Thureau-Dangin

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les papes d'Avignon, G. Mollat

Comment naissent les dogmes, Jules deGaultier

"Admirer la puissance de l'esprit d'Alfred Fouillée et parler avec dédain de William James, aussi bien que de Bergson; c'est se donner un brevet d'incompétence philosophique." p. 98. "Tout le monde sait aujourd'hui que les idées que Nietzsche a émises sur le rôle historique du christianisme, ont juste autant de valeur que les facéties voltairiennes." p. 99

la crédibilité et l'apologétique, A. Gardeil

"L'expérience établit que les hommes arrivent à des convictions très fermes, capables de commander souverainement toute leur conduite par un travail dans lequel l'intelligence discursive joue un rôle assez atténué; quand les principes ont été arrêtés, nous cherchons à voir si le monde physique et l'histoire sont ordonnés d'une façon conforme à ces principes; lorsque cette critique n'aboutit pas à un résultat satisfaisant, l'individu découragé devient sceptique et le plus souvent est incapable de retrouver de nouvelles convictions." p. 157

Histoire du modernisme catholique, Albert Houtin

" . . . un grand mouvement social ne réussit que s'il a pu s'incorporer, d'une façon intime, une idéologie originale et puissante." p. 162

Annales de l'Institut supérieur de philosophie de

Louvain, Essais sur la sensibilité contemporaine,

Raphael Cor

"Bergson est résolument (et avec raison) anti-intellectualiste, car il n'admet point que les choses

de la vie puissent être connues par une science construite soit à l'imitation de la mécanique céleste, soit à l'imitation de la biologie péripatéticienne qui pose la constance des circuits de l'évolution vitale comme une loi impérative du changement; l'avenir est dans l'inconnu." p. 164

la Basilique de Fourvière, son symbolisme, Saint-Marie Perrin

la Russie moderne, Gregoire Alexinsky
Pourquoi on a étouffé l'affaire Valensi, Maurice Pujo
L'Etat moderne et l'organisation internationale,
 David Joyne Hill

Histoire artistique des ordres mendiants, Louis Gillet

"La grande question pour l'artiste n'est pas de savoir que la nature renferme des puissances prodigieusement fécondes, mais de se sentir en mesure de créer, dans la matière brute, des formes capables de nous faire aimer les forces vivantes." p. 240

Maitres d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui, Victor Giraud
les siècles de bronze, Emile Gebhart

L'art de tromper, d'intimider et de corrompre l'électeur,
 Charles Marcault

"Les élections ne sont pas établies pour nommer des mandataires du public, mais pour dire quelle faction jouira provisoirement des avantages que procure le pouvoir. . . . tous les gens qui ont réfléchi sur les illusions de l'esprit, savent qu'il existe beaucoup de sophismes analogues à celui de la démocratie: il en existe même dans les sciences." p. 305

Blancs, bleus et rouges, G. Lenotre
Saint Bonaventure, G. Palhories

" . . . je crois qu'on a commis plus d'une fois des contresens sérieux quand on a essayé de mêler quelque chose de la pensée moderne à ces systèmes anciens; pour rendre l'œuvre . . . intelligible dans la mesure du possible, il conviendrait de la traiter uniquement comme une formation historique." p. 389

Les démocraties latines de l'Amérique, F. Garcia
 Calderon

Fouquier-Tinville, Alphonse Dunoyer

APPENDIX C

PRE-WAR REEVALUATIONS: 1910 - 1914

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO
BENEDETTO CROCE: 1910 - 1914

5 septembre 1910

"Je vous envoie le prospectus d'une revue qui commencera à paraître le 1er novembre. . . . Nous voudrions donner à cette revue une bonne allure littéraire et philosophique . . . le monde universitaire français nous sera donc en totalité étranger." p. 342

13 novembre 1910

" . . . tout ce qui touche qu' 'pragmatisme' est très peu clair; je me demande si les 'pragmatistes' ne cherchent pas à embrouiller leur doctrine." p. 343

28 novembre 1910

"J'ai vu hier Bergson qui m'a dit que votre livre sur Hegel l'avait convaincu du profit qu'il y aurait pour lui à lire Hegel, plus attentivement qu'il ne l'avait fait autrefois.

. . . la revue, dont je vous avais envoyé le programme, ne paraîtra pas; il y a eu trop de complications." p. 343

25 janvier 1911

"Je vous prie de jeter un coup d'oeil sur le chapitre que j'ai ajouté aux Illusions du progrès; je crois avoir ouvert une voie féconde pour des recherches philosophiques sur l'histoire, en montrant que les mouvements vers la grandeur sont toujours 'forcés' et les mouvements vers la décadence toujours naturels; notre nature est invinciblement portée à ce que les philosophes de l'histoire regardent comme mauvais; que ce soit barbarie, ou que ce soit décadence,

. . . la revue la Cité française ne paraîtra pas; les deux fondateurs, qui appartiennent à l'Action française, ont trop voulu faire les maîtres; j'aurais été impuissant, tout en ayant la véritable responsabilité morale . . .

Je vous envoie le programme d'une autre revue que fond un de mes anciens associés, Jean Variot . . . Les hégéliens convenaient bien qu'un moment ne

détruisait pas ce qui avait précédé, au sens qu'il ne croyaient pas que l'histoire fasse jamais table rase; les révolutions sont conservation de certaines choses et destruction d'autres. Marx entendait que le socialisme conservait les acquisitions de l'économie capitaliste; mais si on conserve l'organisation démocratique, on conserve le pouvoir des politiciens sur toutes choses, et cela est certainement contraire à l'idée que le marxisme s'est faite de la révolution . . . je suis très persuadé que . . . un mouvement social manque de force durable quand il n'est pas soutenu par une idéologie puissante, capable de s'imposer. Le socialisme, en tournant à la politique, perd le moyen de se former une telle idéologie; le syndicalisme a pu, un moment, paraître propre à avoir une idéologie élevée; mais il est tombé entre les mains 'd'hyperdemagogues' qui ne comprennent pas la valeur des idées.

C'est en constatant cette situation que j'ai résolu de ne plus rien écrire sur le syndicalisme. Il y a des questions plus intéressantes à examiner, depuis que le mouvement ouvrier ne fournit plus d'expériences propres à s'adapter à une idéologie . . . " pp. 343, 344, 345.

15 février 1911

"En France on a crée à la Sorbonne un enseignement de l'histoire des religions, en vue de faire mal au christianisme; . . . nous verrons bientôt peut-être la science des religions entrer dans l'enseignement secondaire." p. 346

19 février 1911

"Le socialisme devient une démogogie, aussi bien dans les syndicats que dans les luttes politiques. Il n'offre donc plus rien d'intéressant pour les philsofes; c'est pourquoi je me suis résolu à ne plus jamais écrire sur ce sujet." p. 347

17 avril 1911

" . . . les sociologues, ont-ils quelques succès? Le temps de leur gloire doit être bien près de finir." p. 348

8 juillet 1911

" . . . on a en France une idée fort inexacte des valeurs des divers auteurs; on les juge moins d'après ce qu'ils sont, que d'après l'autorité des écrivains qui les introduisent à Paris." p. 432

27 juillet 1911

" . . . 'sincérité absolue': c'est une qualité rare pour le temps actuel." p. 433

25 février 1912

"Les observations de G. P. (G. Papini, Gnoseologia di G. B. Vico) sur Vico sont d'une scolarité qui frise l'absurdité; personne ne serait novateur si on lui défendait de rien voir appris; ce que je crois comprendre, c'est que beaucoup d'italiens actuels ne voient pas la valeur éducative de Vico, ils n'y cherchent que des mots!!" p. 435

16 mars 1912

" . . . il faudrait cesser de discuter et passer à l'application; c'est le seul moyen de rendre clair ce qui est demeuré obscur dans la pensée de Marx." p. 435

6 septembre 1913

"Bergson n'a pas en de maîtres en France: voilà la vérité vraie." p. 47

3 mars 1914

"L'élection de Bergson à l'Académie est un fait considérable, parce que beaucoup de forces avaient été mise en mouvement contre lui; Barrès était le grand meneur de l'attaque." p. 49

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER VIII

A critique of the rationalist prejudices of historians and sociologists in the opening of this chapter is followed by a comprehensive statement of Sorel's evaluation of the role of pragmatism in modern philosophy. Considering the impact of tradition in human affairs, especially physics, Sorel then examines the epistemological impact of the ideas of Claude Bernard and restates his conception of the artificial and natural milieux. In the context of this discussion he underlines the special role of the philosopher and the historian as regulators of human intellectual activity.

Chapter VIII concludes with Sorel's analysis of the struggle of mankind against pain and suffering through its use of religion, art and asceticism. In the final essay Sorel considers the special qualifications of Lenin as a Socialist leader.

The appendix of Chapter VIII contains the last of the Croce letters which detail Sorel's reaction to the war, the future of Socialism and the French intellectual scene generally from 1914 - 1921.

CHAPTER VIII

FINAL WRITINGS; PRAGMATISM, PAIN

AESTHETICS AND ASCETICS:

1914 - 1922

Matériaux D'une Théorie Du Prolétariat

In July, 1914, Georges Sorel completed an introduction to a collection of his earlier writings which appeared in 1919 under the title Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat.¹ Sorel announced his intention to address some thoughts to those speculative thinkers who sought to understand the means by which the human mind could become aware of " . . . le fonctionnement des organismes créés par l'histoire, les tendances des groupes prépondérants, les idées de réforme qui sont, en quelque sorte diffuses dans l'atmosphère d'une époque."² This understanding, Sorel believed, was based on interpretations of historical development which he noted always contained a great deal of subjectivity. Historians, Sorel wrote,

¹Georges Sorel, Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1919).

²Ibid., p. 1. " . . . the functioning of organisms created by history, the tendencies of preponderant groups, the ideas of reform which are somehow diffused in the atmosphere of an epoch."

" . . . les utilisent d'ordinaire sans en connaître parfaitement le signification; les métaphysiciens doivent chercher quels principes forment l'âme de ces systèmes."³

For Sorel, the primary historical force which was capable of motivating a determined human movement in the direction of producing a future appropriate to their hopes was the faith that these groups had " . . . dans une mission qui leur aurait été confiée, la certitude d'un succès poursuivi à travers une multitude d'obstacles."⁴ Rome had had, according to Sorel, an idea of its mission of domination and, he believed that this idea had been efficacious. And Renan's suggestion that the Book of Daniel was a document of primary importance for the philosophy of history because it suggested to the Christian mind one of its most compelling myths was accepted by Sorel who noted approvingly that Renan had disdain for the Greeks for

³Ibid. " . . . use them ordinarily without recognizing their significance; metaphysicians must seek which principles form the soul of these systems."

⁴Ibid., p. 11. Such a movement Sorel had noted in Judiasm: "Lorsque la monarchie salomonienne se fut effondrée, le judaïsme puisa dans les merveilleuses promesses popularisées par les livres de ses prophètes et de ses psalmistes que lisaient avec avidité les exiles, de tels éléments de vie qu'il n'a jamais été aussi sûr de sa foi mosaïque qu'après la ruine de son statut territorial," p. 12. " . . . in a mission which has confided in them the certainty of success in spite of many obstacles."

making of the philosophy of history a simple tracing
 " . . . des tableaux schématiques pour définir les
 successions de formes politiques."⁵

Historical interpretation, Sorel believed, must
 take account " . . . du contrôle qu'une philosophie est
 capable d'exercer sur les réalités vivantes de l'histoire."⁶
 And he chided his contemporaries who were persuaded that
 by following "le rationalisme commun" which speculated
 on morphological evolutions that it was possible to
 render "scientifically" an account of the general move-
 ment of history. Such aberrations, Sorel wrote, " . . .
 nous font deviner que les succès du scientisme historique
 tiennent à des impulsions psychologiques puissantes qui
 poussent l'homme à vouloir être trompé."⁷ The theories
 of the rational state, Sorel noted with irony, placed
 the demagogues in the position of opposing logic to
 history; their paradoxical goal was to persuade the
 masses " . . . que les lois de l'histoire imposent la
 réalisation des projets formés par les destructeurs de

⁵Ibid., p. 13. Sorel quoted from Renan, Histoire
 du peuple d'Israël, tome V, pp. 356,359. " . . . sche-
 matic pictures to define the succession of political forms."

⁶Sorel, Matériaux, p. 13. " . . . of the control
 which a philosophy is capable of exercising on the living
 realities of history."

⁷Ibid., p. 16. " . . . make us aware that the
 success of scientific history is connected with powerful
 psychological impulses which cause man to want to be
 misled."

l'histoire."⁸ And the scientific sociologists, Sorel continued, who were themselves closely tied to the rational state, were firmly convinced that their understanding of the past permitted them to obtain a very probable perception of the future. This approach, Sorel noted, in reference to William's James schematic tableau of philosophic conceptions arranged around the two poles of rationalism and empiricism, was anti-empirical because empiricism " . . . ne consentira jamais à annoncer l'avenir."⁹ It was absurd, Sorel concluded, to operate in the manner of the rationalists " . . . qui, hallucinés par leurs préjugés unitaires, mêlent les deux genres (rationalisme et empiricisme), prétendent imposer au second les conditions du premier et s'égarer ainsi dans le scientisme historique."¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 17. " . . . that the laws of history impose the realization of projects formed by the destroyers of history."

⁹Ibid., p. 23. Sorel referred to William James, Le Pragmatisme, 1er chapitre. " . . . will never consent to forecasting the future."

¹⁰Ibid., p. 24. William James, Sorel noted " . . . paraît avoir été surtout choqué par la suppression du monde réel qu'effectuent les rationalistes au profit d'un monde idéal, bien ordonné, où tout est net," p. 24. Sorel noted in a concluding note of the Avant-propos that the war had delayed publication of Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat until 1918 although it was prepared by July, 1914. Speaking of the intervening war, he noted, "la sanglante leçon de choses qui se produira en Russie fera sentir à tous les ouvriers qu'il ya une contradiction entre la démocratie et la missia du

De L'Utilité Du Pragmatisme

Writing in the avant-propos to De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, which was to be the final book-length study of his career, Georges Sorel continued his attack on what he called "les préjugés scientifiques" and charged that the statesmen (hommes d'Etat) of his day were working to constitute a political art which would permit " . . . de charlatans, de rêveurs et d'étourdis" to dominate the future."¹¹ William James, Sorel believed, had conducted a battle against "les servants du scientisme"; and he praised James for having developed a philosophy "d'un robuste bon sens" which showed James to be " . . . capables d'interpréter sérieusement les pratiques de la méthode expérimentale."¹² Sorel praised what he called "pragmatisme militant" for having engaged in the difficult battle against "scientisme" and he charged that it was an anomaly of language to label pragmatisme

prolétariat; l'idée de constituer un gouvernement de producteurs ne périra pas," p. 53. " . . . who deluded by their unitary prejudices, mix the two genres (rationalism and empiricism), claiming to impose on the second the conditions of the first thus misleading scientific history."

¹¹ Georges Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1921), p. 1. This work was completed in 1917 although its publication was delayed until 1921.

¹² Ibid., p. 2. Sorel recommended a study he had read which was dedicated to William James and Henri Bergson entitled "Les critiques du rationalisme" by André Chaumeix in Revue hebdomadaire (Paris, January 1, 1910). " . . . capable of seriously understanding practices of the experimental method."

anti-intellectual: "Par une de ces anomalies du langage qui sont nombreuses dans la philosophie, on nomme souvent: doctrines anti-intellectualistes celles qui voudraient écarter les confusions engendrées par le 'scientisme' en vue de donner pleine confiance dans les résultats du travail légitime de l'intelligence."¹³

Sorel admitted, however, there had been many confused attempts to state the doctrine of pragmatism with the result that pragmatism had been celebrated by some as "la vérité transatlantique" and this "enthousiasme inquiétant" had caused many to wonder " . . . si le pragmatisme renferme assez de matière propre pour mériter d'être classé parmi les systèmes qui comptent dans le développement de l'intelligence."¹⁴ Sorel believed that a proper understanding of the pragmatic approach to truth would justify his conclusion that pragmatism would become one of the essential elements of modern thought.

¹³Ibid., footnote 2. "By one of those anomalies of language which are numerous in philosophy one often calls anti-intellectual those doctrines which would eliminate the confusion engendered by "scientisme" for the purpose of giving full confidence to the results of the legitimate work of the intelligence."

¹⁴Ibid., p. 4. " . . . if pragmatism includes sufficient material proper to merit it being classed among the systems which contribute to the development of intelligence."

Pragmatism, Sorel believed, was born of the need to protest against "la superstition de la dialectique."¹⁵ William James, according to Sorel, had provided no concentrated or complete definition of pragmatism but he had recognized that it was launched as a movement by Charles Peirce in 1878. Peirce, Sorel continued, had invited his readers to desert "les chapelles où l'on célèbre les mystères des abstractions, pour . . . le vaste domaine de la variété concrète."¹⁶ To obtain perfect clarity in ideas relative to an object, Peirce believed it was necessary to consider the practical effects to which the idea seemed capable of leading. To the conception of these immediate or long-term effects, Sorel continued, are reduced our complete conception of the object itself. These considerations led Charles Peirce to say, Sorel noted, that Catholics and Protestants should not debate transubstantiation " . . . quand ils sont d'accord sur

¹⁵Ibid. Sorel noted his own rule of criticism which he believed was closely related to the ideas of William James: "La véritable méthode à suivre pour connaître les défauts, les insuffisances et les erreurs d'une philosophie considérable, consiste à la critiquer d'après ses propres principes." footnote 1.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 5. The article by Peirce had appeared in French in la Revue philosophique, in January, 1879, and Sorel believed its ideas " . . . avoir en d'influence avant l'époque où les idées de William James eurent pénétré chez nous." footnote 1. " . . . the churches where one celebrates the mysteries of abstractions for the vast domain of the concrete variety."

les effets de la présence réelle."¹⁷ Sorel remarked that it had occurred to him long before reading Peirce that " . . . nous éprouvons d'autant moins le besoin de définir un principe 'en forme' que nous sommes devenus plus habiles dans ses applications, en sorte qu'on aurait le droit de dire que la véritable définition d'un principe réside dans l'usage que nous en faisons journallement."¹⁸

Georges Sorel did not believe that pragmatism could be weakened by charges of subjectivity. He insisted that the pragmatic conception of reality as presented by William James would answer the attacks of the rationalist adversaries who had charged that the

¹⁷Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 5. Sorel quoted Charles Peirce from la Revue philosophique (January, 1879) p. 48. And Sorel further noted that it was probable that Edouard Le Roy in his interpretation of dogma entitled Dogme et critique had borrowed the following observation from Charles Peirce: " . . . ceux-ci imposeraient aux fidèles des règles strictes de conduite, mais laisseraient à chacun une très grande liberté pour se faire une représentation intellectuelle de choses," pp. 19-23, 32 (Sorel's notation). " . . . when they are in agreement on the effects of the real presence."

¹⁸Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 6. Both Karl Marx and William James were passionate writers, Sorel added, and thus their " . . . affirmations . . . ne peuvent être utilisés qu'après avoir été fortement réduites par un long travail de revision," p. 7. "Pour William James, comme pour Marx, il faut reprendre toutes les formules, en les regardant plutôt comme des suggestions que comme des expressions de thèses applicables," p. 8. " . . . we feel so much the less the need to define a principle 'in form' that we became more able in its applications so that we would have the right to say that the true definition of a principle resides in the daily usage that we make of it."

spirit of pragmatism was "barbarement prosaïque."¹⁹ James' conception of reality, according to Sorel, conceived the truth as being essentially a relationship between two things: an idea on one hand and a reality exterior to the idea on the other. This relationship according to James composed a matrix which included elements which were both psychological and physical. The pragmatist proposed, Sorel continued, to verify ideas by a process which was subordinated to the experience " . . . que les conditions de notre développement nous incitent à interpréter."²⁰ This process, Sorel noted, did not lead to a unitary interpretation of reality but instead provided for "plusieurs genres de réalités."²¹ If this conception were the basis of the charge of subjectivity against pragmatism, Sorel concluded, the same could be said of the procedure by which a physicist developed explanations: " . . . il les corrige au fur et à mesure que ses recherches personnelles le conduisent à des découvertes que ses prédécesseurs n'avaient

¹⁹Ibid., p. 81.

²⁰Ibid. " . . . that the conditions of our development incite us to interpret."

²¹Ibid. Sorel added: "C'est . . . une . . . conception multiforme de la réalité." " . . . several genre of realities."

pas soupçonnées."²² It was by this cumulative and historical development, Sorel believed, " . . . nous arrivons à organiser une 'nature artificielle.'"²³ The pragmatic conception of truth, Sorel concluded " . . . est . . . que la relation de vérité est une relation susceptible d'expérience définie et, par conséquent, susceptible d'être décrite aussi bien que nommée, qu'elle n'est pas unique en son genre et qu'elle n'est ni invariable ni universelle."²⁴

Through pragmatism Sorel discovered what he believed to be a much more satisfying idea of tradition. For pragmatism, Sorel wrote " . . . la tradition est un élément de premier ordre dans la connaissance."²⁵ Sorel cautioned, however, that tradition was a productive force

²²Ibid. " . . . he corrects them in proportion as his personal research directs him to discoveries that his predecessors had not suspected."

²³Ibid., p. 85. " . . . we come to organize an 'artificial nature.'"

²⁴Ibid., p. 173. Sorel quoted: William James, *L'idée de vérité*, p. 205. " . . . is . . . that the relation of truth is a relation susceptible to defined experience and, consequently, susceptible to being described as well as named, that it is not unique in its genre and that it is neither invariable nor universal."

²⁵Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 185. " . . . tradition is an element of first order in knowledge."

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only " . . . où . . . existent ces libres concurrences de volontés éclairées."²⁶ To those of his contemporaries who used tradition in their political and religious polemics, and to whom " . . . la tradition n'est pas nourrie de liberté, mais enregistre les décisions de autorité," Sorel responded, " . . . le pragmatisme n'a donc rien à débattre avec l'idée réactionnaire de la tradition qui fleurit en Europe . . . pour parler comme il convient du pragmatisme, il ne faut jamais séparer la liberté et la raison . . . "²⁷ The tradition to which Sorel recognized the right of participation in the formation of the contemporary mind was that which was " . . . le fruit des efforts libres et raisonnés de nos pères."²⁸ On this heritage, he concluded, " . . . travaillent notre liberté et notre raison en vue d'améliorer nos conditions actuelles de vie et de transmettre, si faire se peut, quelque chose d'utile à nos successeurs."²⁹

²⁶Ibid. " . . . where these free concurrences of enlightened will exist."

²⁷Ibid., pp. 185-86. " . . . tradition is not nourished by liberty but makes the decisions of authority." Sorel responded, " . . . pragmatism, thus, has nothing to debate with the reactionary idea of tradition that flourished in Europe . . . in order to talk as it suits pragmatism, liberty and reason must never be separated."

²⁸Ibid., p. 186. " . . . the fruit of the free and reasoned efforts of our fathers."

²⁹Ibid. " . . . our liberty and reason work in view of ameliorating our present conditions of life and to transmit, if possible, something useful to our successors."

Modern physics represented for Sorel a realm of human knowledge whose recent turbulations had major implications for the acceptability of pragmatism. Claude Bernard, who Sorel regarded as "le principal législateur de la méthode expérimentale," had, Sorel believed, been greatly influenced by Vico's doctrine which stated that man can know geometry in an absolute fashion because geometry was a work of his intelligence, " . . . mais non la nature, qui est une oeuvre de Dieu."³⁰ The elements of mathematical certainty, Sorel added, were human products and constituted creative operations. The truth, according to Sorel's understanding of Claude Bernard, appeared to be defined as a necessary and absolute relationship, but Sorel cautioned " . . . ce rapport ne peut être absolu qu'autant que les conditions en sont simples et subjectives, c'est-à-dire que l'esprit a la conscience qu'il les connaît toutes (c'est ce qui a lieu pour les mathématiques)."³¹ When, instead of concerning himself with what Sorel called "des rapports subjectifs

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 288-89. Sorel noted that Claude Bernard had studied Michelet's 1835 translation entitled Oeuvres choisies de Vico, p. 236, see footnote in De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 289. " . . . but not nature which is a work of God."

³¹ Ibid., pp. 289-90. " . . . this relation is only able to be absolute when the conditions of it are simple and subjective, that is to say that mind has the conscience that it knows all of them (that which took place for mathematics)."

dont son esprit a créés les conditions," man wanted to know the objective relationships of nature which he has not created " . . . immédiatement le critérium intérieur et conscient lui fait défaut."³² Man assumed, Sorel continued, that in the objective or "extérieur" world the truth was equally constituted by necessary relationships but knowledge of the conditions of these relationships escaped him. It was necessary in these conditions, Sorel wrote " . . . qu'il eût créé ces conditions pour en posséder la connaissance et la conception absolues."³³ Claude Bernard noted, according to Sorel, that in these conditions " . . . l'homme devient un inventeur de phénomènes, un véritable contremaître de la création. . . . "³⁴

Georges Sorel proposed to group under "la rubrique de nature artificielle," the organization of the experiences of the laboratory which had, he believed, established many useful theories. The distinction between "la nature artificielle" and "la nature naturelle," Sorel wrote " . . . dépend évidemment des idées de Vico qui

³²Ibid., p. 290. " . . . immediately the interior criterion and awareness made him default."

³³Ibid. Sorel credited this thought to Claude Bernard, Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale, pp. 51, 52, in Pragmatisme, p. 290. " . . . that he had created these conditions to possess from them knowledge and the Absolute conception."

³⁴Ibid., p. 291. " . . . man becomes an inventor of phenomena, a true counter master of creation."

déniait à l'homme la possibilité de posséder la science de ce qu'il n'a pas fait."³⁵ Although Sorel noted that Vico's thought had not had a notable influence on modern thought, he affirmed that " . . . le moment est venu de développer le système de Vico, en l'application à une physique dont le XVIIIe siècle ne soupçonnait pas encore la constitution."³⁶ For a long time, Sorel observed, a number of savants had noted that their studies concerned less the world which was given to man than that which man had created in the world. The pragmatist openly stated, Sorel asserted, that "la nature artificielle" interests human life at least as much as "la nature naturelle": " . . . il admire sa (la nature artificielle) fécondité qui lui paraît devoir être indéfiniment croissante; il se demande comment l'homme peut avoir des ambitions assez insensées pour croire que la "nature artificielle" ne suffit pas à occuper son génie."³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., p. 336. Sorel referred to Michelet's translation: OEuvres choisies de Vico, pp. 218-19, in a footnote in Pragmatisme, p. 336. " . . . evidently depends on the ideas of Vico who denied man the possibility of possessing the science of that which he has not made."

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 336-37. " . . . the moment has come to develop the system of Vico, in the application to a physics of which the eighteenth century did not yet suspect the constitution."

³⁷ Ibid., p. 337. Sorel noted additionally " . . . nous serions condamnés à abandonner l'idée de certitude qui avait dominé la science antique." " . . .

But to concentrate on "la nature artificielle" at the expense of "la nature naturelle" would arouse complaints from both the spiritualists, Sorel noted, who would consider this a blasphemy of the all-powerful creator, and the materialists who would see in it a denial of " . . . la raison immanente qui soutient, croient-ils, le cours de l'Univers."³⁸ The critique of such "préjugés," Sorel concluded, could only have efficacious results if it were conducted pragmatically " . . . c'est-à-dire en examinant leur principales applications."³⁹

Sorel assumed that "la nature artificielle" was separated from "la nature naturelle" by something " . . . chargé d'irréversibilité."⁴⁰ This zone of separation appeared to Sorel to be " . . . une zone rebelle à la

he admires its fertility which seemed to him ought to be growing indefinitely; he asks himself how man is able to have ambitions so senseless to believe that artificial nature does not suffice to occupy his genius."

³⁸ Ibid., p. 338. In a footnote, Sorel added: "Les matérialistes manifestent autant de fanatisme dans leur admiration de cette raison immanente que les spiritualistes en ont jamais manifesté dans leur culte du créateur." " . . . the imminent reason that they believed supports the course of the Universe."

³⁹ Ibid. " . . . that is to say in examining their principal applications."

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 341. " . . . charged with irreversibility."

loi des mathématiques" and he added that " . . . on doit regarder la première (la nature naturelle) comme contaminée par de l'indétermination."⁴¹ Sorel noted that many eminent geometers did not agree with the opposition of chance to the laws of physics. They always insisted on a perfect determinism whose difficulty of proof was the result only of a temporary ignorance. These metaphysicians represented the strong devotion which Sorel identified as " . . . l'actuel fanatisme moniste" among his contemporaries.⁴² The idea that determinism was hidden under that which the common language called chance (hasard) rendered important services to those Sorel called "notre bourgeoisie" who wanted, he believed, to advance the power of the rational state and who thus had " . . . peu de goût pour les légends mystiques."⁴³ The pragmatist who had no interest in favoring hypocrisy, Sorel asserted, rejected this explanation of chance (hasard) " . . . parce qu'il ne voit point qu'elle ait rendu aucun service aux savants qui ont eu, durant le XIXe siècle,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 343. "The two systems, he concluded, . . . n'appartiennent donc pas, en conséquence, à un même genre . . ." " . . . a rebel zone to the law of mathematics" " . . . one must regard the first (natural nature) as contaminated by indetermination."

⁴²Ibid., p. 347.

⁴³Ibid. " . . . little taste for mystic legends."

à faire de si vastes applications du calcul de probabilités."⁴⁴ The pragmatist, Sorel added, wanted to find in a philosophy those theses which served to sustain human creative activity and thus the pragmatist did not comprehend the value of hiding considerations with respect to a world separated from that which was man's own construction.

The only "donnée véritable" which existed in the history of science, Sorel affirmed, ". . . est la nature artificielle à laquelle nous ne cessons d'ajouter chaque jour quelque construction en vue de conquérir plus de pouvoir sur la matière; nous avançons au milieu de l'inconnu sans nous douter ordinairement de ce que nous pourrons faire le lendemain."⁴⁵ This advance of human knowledge had the paradoxical effect of increasing the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 349. ". . . because he did not see that it had rendered service to scholars who during the nineteenth century had had to make from so vast applications the calculation of probabilities."

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 350. The study of the past played a special role in this process; Sorel wrote: ". . . les bons professeurs tirent un excellent parti de l'examen du passé, pour formuler des règles de prudence, capables de rendre de grands services aux inventeurs d'hypothèses." In a footnote, he noted the value of rejecting the thesis of progress in consideration of the past: "Depuis que les doctrines illusoires du progrès sont abandonnées, tous les monuments historiques sont considérés de la même manière," p. 350, footnote 2. ". . . given truth" ". . . is artificial nature to which we do not cease to add everyday some construction in view of conquering more power over matter; we advance in the field of the unknown without ordinarily suspecting what we will be able to do the next day."

sense of relative ignorance, a state of mind which Sorel did not believe existed in the ancient civilizations which had mistakenly believed that they had reached the peak of the philosophy of nature. This new manner of thinking Sorel attributed to the new conditions of what he called the capitalist regime and its ceaseless process of revolutionizing production. This activity which Sorel noted occurred in the "artificial nature" as did all human creations, had begun to displace "la nature naturelle" in human preoccupations. He concluded by observing that careful reflection on the course of the development of the artificial milieu would prove to be "audessus des fantaisies des idéalistes" who speculated on "la nature naturelle."⁴⁶

The constitution of the artificial milieu suggested, Sorel noted, that humanity had become capable of imposing on the movement of things, directions opposed to those which would have existed without this intervention. But Sorel warned " . . . nous ne pourrons jamais soumettre complètement les phénomènes . . . à notre intelligence."⁴⁷ It was necessary, he added, to destroy an enormous mass of accumulated forces to create new

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 356. " . . . above idealist fantasies."

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 426. " . . . we will never be able to subject completely phenomena to our intelligence."

forces which could be organized for human profit. Pointing to the waste of stored energy in coal he observed:

"Cela est surtout frappant dans les appareils thermiques qui ne rendent qu'une fraction bien minime de l'énergie qui était dans le charbon."⁴⁸ Sorel concluded that

" . . . la nature ne cesse de travailler, avec une lenteur sournoise, à la ruine de toutes nos oeuvres."⁴⁹ Only

by incessant labor could humanity provide itself with the means to maintain the artificial milieu--to stop even

for a short time would tend to cause a return to what

Sorel called "l'ordre ancien." He concluded: " . . . on

peut dire que la matière impose ses lois dès que l'esprit se retire."⁵⁰ The true comprehension of the relationship

between the two realms, Sorel wrote " . . . est celle qui oppose la nature naturelle à la nature artificielle."⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid., footnote 1. "That is especially striking in thermal instruments which only return a minimal fraction of energy in coal."

⁴⁹Ibid. " . . . nature does not cease to work, with a sly slowness, in the ruin of all our works."

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 426-27. In a footnote, Sorel emphasized that " . . . tout permet de supposer que le travail ira toujours en s'intensifiant. Nous pouvons encore observer que ce pessimisme tend à renforcer le sentiment de la réalité," p. 426, footnote 1. " . . . we can say that matter imposes its laws as soon as spirit withdraws."

⁵¹Ibid., p. 427. " . . . is that which opposes natural nature to artificial nature."

The role of the philosopher in the contemporary world, Sorel reiterated, was " . . . réfléchir sur les mystères de la vie."⁵² Human intelligence, Sorel noted, in reference to a suggestion made by Henri Bergson, was not at all that which Plato had claimed in the "Allegory of the Cave." Human intelligence was " . . . nécessairement collective et progressive."⁵³ Like human science, philosophy required multitudes of research and collaboration. Henceforth, Sorel believed, history would become the great regulator of human intellectual activity with the result that "Celui qui se place au point de vue des historiens, n'admettra plus de théories extra-expérimentales de la physique, de droit naturel, de philosophie permanente; l'humanité construit des doctrines dont la valeur est constatée par l'utilité qu'on leur reconnaît au cours d'une longue expérience; nous sommes ainsi amenés au pragmatisme."⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., p. 444. In a footnote Sorel called attention to his essay in Revue de métaphysique et de morale, January, 1911, p. 99. " . . . to reflect on the mysteries of life."

⁵³ Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 446 and Henri Bergson, Evolution créatrice, p. 124. In an interesting note, Sorel advanced an undeveloped speculation: "Il me paraît très vraisemblable que les musiciens ont, plus ou moins vaguement, discerné les affinités qui existent entre leurs manières de sentir et les conceptions du monde qu'on trouve dans l'Evolution créatrice," Pragmatisme, p. 450.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 462. The impact of this development would be great in the realm of theology where Sorel

Introduction A L'Économie Moderne

By October, 1919, Georges Sorel was convinced that the new and difficult conditions in which the European states found themselves following the war provided an opportune moment for the publication of a third edition of his study entitled Introduction à l'économie moderne.⁵⁵ The immense material and moral miseries which the war had produced had provoked what Sorel called "une épidémie d'hystérie communiste."⁵⁶ The people, he observed, had been stricken with panic by four years of horrible carnage, and they had come to believe that there could be no peace, no national order and no happiness until "le capitalisme classique" had been overturned. The phenomena of government intervention into affairs, formerly regarded as private, suggested to Sorel that

speculated "On peut dire que tout ce qui n'est pas susceptible d'être contrôlé pragmatiquement, disparaît peu à peu . . ." p. 464. "Those who place themselves in the point of view of historians will no longer admit extra-experimental theories of physics, natural rights, permanent philosophy; humanity constructs doctrines whose value is confirmed by the usefulness that is recognized in them in the course of a long experience; thus we are led to pragmatism."

⁵⁵ Georges Sorel, Introduction à l'économie moderne (3rd éd. revue et augmentée; Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1922). All references to this work are based on Sorel's "Avertissement pour la troisième édition" which was completed in October, 1919, and will be cited hereinafter as "Avertissement."

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. II.

socialization had become a possibility in spite of its conflict with what he called "des anciennes valeurs" of the bourgeoisie. In this atmosphere Sorel suggested to his readers " . . . qu'il y a plusieurs genres parfaitement distincts de socialisation."⁵⁷

Sorel disputed the claims of those whom he labeled "les archimandrites de l'Entente, les Poincaré, les Clemenceau, les Wilson" who had widely proclaimed that the defeat of Germany had assured the definitive triumph of "une merveilleuse Justice." Sorel compared "les bourgeoisies démocratiques," who had claimed their capacity to safeguard modern civilization, to the imperial autocracy which presided over the fall of the Roman Empire. These whom Sorel called "nos bourgeoisies plutocratiques" had " . . . pas de hautes ambitions . . . elles demandent seulement à durer."⁵⁸ The capitalists, he charged, believed they had no reason to fear the future as long as the present regime was capable of producing abundant riches. But all philosophers, Sorel insisted, had taught that humanity needed to combine with its daily bread "une nourriture spirituelle."

⁵⁷ Ibid. " . . . that there are several perfectly distinct types of socialization."

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. IV. " . . . no high ambitions . . . they only asked to endure."

During the war the leaders of the Entente, Sorel continued, had ceaselessly provided the unhappy combattants with a discourse on their future happiness: " . . . prenez patience, disait-on aux soldats, vos souffrances préparent une ère de bonheur universel; quand les méchants Hohenzollern ne tyranniseront plus l'Europe centrale, des fleuves de lait et de miel couleront pour les défenseurs de la Justice."⁵⁹ In response to these exhortations, Sorel observed, there arose a widespread demand for a life of greater ease, for labors less crushing, and for more accessible pleasures: " . . . de toutes les poitrines populaires s'élève une effrayante protestation contre la permanence de la douleur."⁶⁰ These hopes would remain unfulfilled, Sorel believed, because the promise had been false: " . . . la douleur est accrochée aux racines de la vie."⁶¹ Only by adopting

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. XV. " . . . take patience, they said to the soldiers, your sufferings prepare an era of universal happiness; when the wicked Hohenzollern no longer tyrannize central Europe, rivers of milk and honey will flow for the defenders of justice."

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. XV, XVI. " . . . in all popular chests arose a frightening protest against the permanence of suffering."

⁶¹ Sorel, "L'Humanite contre la douleur," Georges Sorel added as an "Appendice" to Introduction a l'économie moderne in October, 1919. Sorel noted his objective in this essay: "Je voudrais monterer ici que l'on peut établir une psychologie riche en résultats pratiques, en partant de la considération de la lutte que soutient l'humanité contre la loi naturelle qui la condamne à la douleur," p. 400. " . . . suffering is attached to the roots of life."

a perspective which recognized that humanity was engaged in a constant struggle against a natural law which condemned it to pain and suffering (la douleur) would it be possible, he concluded, to comprehend " . . . les problèmes essentiels de notre espèce."⁶²

L'Humanité Contre La Douleur

Metaphysicians, Sorel continued, had constructed hypothesis to justify the existence of "la douleur" which had relied too exclusively on supernatural intervention or an assumption of biological perfection. Sorel proposed to reconsider what he believed was the common interpretation that humanity avoided pain (la douleur) and sought pleasure: " . . . je propose de dire que, sous l'aiguillon de la douleur, l'esprit invente des manières de vivre susceptibles de procurer du plaisir, qui recouvrent assez la douleur pour que celle-ci semble seulement un incident dont nous pourrions débarrasser l'ordre naturel."⁶³ When this occurred in animals, Sorel believed, instinct and education left little latitude for choice--but with humanity the options were wider and freedom was more dominant. The perspective

⁶²Ibid., p. 399.

⁶³Ibid., p. 404. " . . . I propose to say that, under the goad of suffering, spirit invents ways of living susceptible to procuring pleasure, that covers suffering well enough provided it seems only an incident which we will be able to separate from the natural order."

of pleasure was sometimes so attractive, Sorel wrote:
 " . . . que l'homme accepte, pour parvenir au bonheur,
 les épreuves d'une longue carrière de dangereuses
 pérégrinations."⁶⁴ That which permitted humanity to
 escape from "la loi de la douleur," Sorel believed,
 were inventions which belonged to diverse genres of
 human activity. Sorel concluded that if the reaction
 of man against "la douleur" could be traced to its roots
 one would find the point of contact between mind and
 body: " . . . La douleur correspondant au sentiment le
 plus complet que nous ayons de notre corps, on peut voir
 en elle une sorte du synthèse . . . L'intervention con-
 sécutive à la douleur, est le premier centre sprituel
 organisateur de la psychologie active."⁶⁵

Examining the history of civilizations, Sorel
 identified various practices which he believed had been
 motivated by the desire to overcome "la douleur." He

⁶⁴Ibid. Sorel wrote: "Chez l'homme, . . . la
 liberté est dominante, celle-ci entraîne avec elle des
 préoccupations parfois très vives, comme cela a lieu
 dans tous les essais nouveaux que nous tentons." " . . .
 that man accepts, in order to arrive at happiness, the
 proof of a long career of dangerous peregrinations."

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 405. To this Sorel added, "Si les
 métaphysiciens n'ont su rien dire de vraiment utile sur
 cette jonction, c'est qu'ils n'ont pas aperçu la portée
 de la lutte engagée par l'humanité contre la douleur."
 "Suffering corresponds to the most complete feeling we
 have of our body, we can see in it a sort of synthesis.
 . . . Consecutive intervention of suffering is the first
 central spiritual organizer of active psychology."

noted the practice of oriental asceticism which seemed to provide the means of rising above "la loi de la douleur." Ascetics, he observed, had been looked upon as "des favoris des dieux" by those who, especially in rich countries, feared pain and suffering.⁶⁶ The accomplished sages, Sorel concluded, had served to give an extremely high idea of happiness " . . . procuré par . . . les effroyables mortifications que ces ascètes s'imposaient."⁶⁷ By hearing these "personnages privilégiés" recount their dreams, Sorel continued, the philosophers were led to think that ascetic discipline permitted the soul to pass from the darkness of human life to the celestial light: " . . . en s'associant au corps, l'âme aurait subi une déchéance, étant désormais condamnée à la douleur; mais l'âme pourrait se racheter, en s'affranchissant de tous les besoins matériels auxquels sont assujétis les humains ordinaires."⁶⁸

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 406.

⁶⁷Ibid. " . . . procured by frightful mortifications that these ascetics imposed on themselves."

⁶⁸Ibid. "The physical meagerness of ascetics, Sorel wrote, gave birth to the idea that the just man is very thin and from this was born numerous legends relative to levitation of saints who floated in the air, legends which Catholicism has absorbed." "It is probable, Sorel speculated, that this idea gave birth to the practice of the ordeal of water in which the accused must float to prove his innocence," p. 406. " . . . in associating with the body, the soul would have undergone downfall, being henceforth condemned to suffering; but

The Greeks attempted to accommodate the ideas of the oriental ascetics to their civilization. The program of Socrates, Sorel speculated: ". . . était probablement de permettre aux Athéniens de s'affranchir des charges de la matière."⁶⁹ He wanted to create an education of temperance but ". . . ses leçons ne parvenaient malheureusement à avoir d'efficacité que sur des âmes d'élite."⁷⁰ The stoics, Sorel continued, also sought to defend humanity against "la douleur" and they reinforced the education of temperance but they ". . . n'osèrent pas aller jusqu'à conseiller d'imiter les excès des ascètes orientaux qui aurait trop blessé l'esthétique de leur compatriotes."⁷¹ Stoicism produced, Sorel concluded, an abundance of literary consolations but did not produce any practical results.

soul could rebuy itself, in freeing itself of all material needs to which ordinary humans are subjected."

⁶⁹Ibid. ". . . was probably to permit the Athenians to free themselves of material requirements."

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 407. ". . . its lessons, unhappily only succeeded in having efficacy on the souls of elites."

⁷¹Ibid. ". . . will not dare to go up to counselling an imitation of the excesses of oriental ascetics who would have wounded too much the aesthetics of their compatriots."

In Christianity, Sorel found the ascetic movement against "la douleur," " . . . a pris son plein développement."⁷² Not only did Christianity excite numerous "héros de l'ascétisme" but also the concept of " . . . l'union divine remplace le délire des grandeurs."⁷³ Sorel believed that the resulting religious experiences of Christianity, which he called " . . . des formes de mystique atténué," had played a considerable role in the battle against "la douleur."⁷⁴ He noted especially the Anglo-Saxon Protestants who he observed had split their existences into two very independent zones: " . . . l'une est consacrée aux affaires industrielles et commerciales; l'autre est vouée à la méditation biblique."⁷⁵ As long as these scriptural experiences remained important in Protestant communities, Sorel believed, they would provide an effective means of combatting "la douleur."

⁷²Ibid., p. 408. " . . . took its full development."

⁷³Ibid. " . . . the divine union replacing the delirium of grandeur."

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 409.

⁷⁵Ibid. " . . . one is consecrated to industrial and commercial business; the other is vowed to biblical meditation."



With the Catholics, Sorel believed, " . . . l'expérience scripturaire est remplacée par l'expérience sacramentelle que renferme le culte eucharistique."⁷⁶ This more mystical element of Catholicism made it easier to practice than Protestantism: "Les illuminations étincelantes des églises, le décor somptueux, les vêtements qui donnent aux officiers un aspect fabuleux; les gestes, les évolutions cérémonielles, les déclamations solennelles, la musique; tout cela donne au culte catholique une remarquable ressemblance avec les merveilles de l'opéra."⁷⁷ The Catholic church, Sorel added, conserved the use of incense, which had served the Orient so well as a means of producing intoxication, because " . . . elle sait à quel point les parfums peuvent assoupir l'intelligence."⁷⁸

⁷⁶Ibid. " . . . the scriptural experience is replaced by sacramental experience that surrounds the eucharistic cult."

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 410. Sorel added: "Les apologistes du clergé catholique vantent, sans toujours la bien comprendre, l'habile esthétique cléricale . . . ils n'osent guère analyser les raisons de son succès." "The glittering illuminations, the sumptuous decor, clothing which gives the officials a fabulous aspect; the gestures, ceremonial evolutions, solemn oratory, the music; all that gives the Catholic cult a remarkable resemblance to opera marvels."

⁷⁸Ibid. Sorel noted in a humorous footnote: "C'est ce que savent aussi les femmes galantes qui se parfument pour s'imposer plus facilement aux hommes, en leur faisant perdre une partie de leur liberté de jugement," footnote 1. " . . . it knows to what point perfumes can soften intelligence."

Those who lived in capitalist societies, Sorel concluded, who were fatigued by a very demanding business life, found an important relief in this Catholic cult and this explained, Sorel believed, the capacity of Catholicism to endure in such societies.

Agreeing with Renan, Sorel suggested that instead of attempting to suppress this desire for intoxication " . . . ne vaudrait-il pas mieux essayer de la rendre douce, aimable, accompagnée des sentiments moraux."⁷⁹

Sorel noted that of all the means which humanity possessed to overcome "la douleur" alcoholic intoxication was the most accessible to the masses, and he rejected the temperance movement currently active in the United States noting " . . . le régime de la tempérance légale semble avoir pour effet la vulgarisation de l'éther, de la cocaïne et de l'opium."⁸⁰ Renan had observed that, for many, the time of intoxication was second only to "l'heure

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 411. Sorel referred to Renan, Feuilles détachées, pp. 383-84. " . . . would not it be better to render it soft, amiable, accompanied by moral sentiments."

⁸⁰ Sorel, "L'Humanité contre la douleur," p. 412. Sorel believed that the use of opium would be more dangerous for the Europeans than the Asiatics because it was so incompatible with the current European life-style: " . . . la vie de nos classes riches à été jusque'ici trop active pour qu'elles se laissent aller à un vice qui convient surtout à des classes indolentes." " . . . the regime of legal temperance seems to have as an effect the popularization of ether, cocaine and opium."



de l'amour," to which Sorel added that from intoxication " . . . nous passons, tout naturellement à la gourmandise qui a pris un si déplorable développement à la suite de la dernière guerre."⁸¹ Sorel believed that "les fêtes de la gourmandise" occupied a place of honor among the rich classes of all civilizations.

Libidinal excitation (la lubricité) which Sorel believed accompanied "la gourmandise" in Oriental civilizations was accomplished in the European world in the theaters and the concerts of the large cities and through literature: "Dans nos grandes cités les théâtres et les concerts tiennent la place que l'Orient attribuait aux danses lubriques . . . Nos romains n'obtiendraient pas grand succès s'ils n'étaient pas composés de manière à produire une sérieuse élévation des désirs sexuels."⁸² Sorel considered that this literature constituted a defense against "la douleur."

⁸¹The quote from Renan is from Feuilles détachées; Sorel's observation appeared in "L'humanité contre la douleur," p. 412. " . . . we pass naturally to gluttony which took so deplorable a development following the last war."

⁸²Ibid., p. 414. Sorel noted the creative role of humanity in the production of " . . . des inventions érotiques qui constituent un moyen d'une extrême puissance pour vaincre la loi de la douleur." "In our large cities, theatres and concerts hold the place that the Orient gives to lubric dancers. . . . Our novels would not obtain great success if they were not composed in a manner to produce a serious elevation of sexual desires."

Music, which Sorel thought had the capacity to relieve the tensions of anxiety, had played, he believed, an important role in the life of the Second Empire. The music of Offenbach, he speculated, had corresponded perfectly to the needs of a society troubled by an economy " . . . enragée de spéculation."⁸³ The bourgeoisie, with its need for relief from intense economic activity, had a special musical inclination: "Il me paraît probable que des mélodies faciles à retenir, adaptées à des situations bouffonnes et douées d'un rythme entraînant, constitueront longtemps encore le fond de l'art lyrique de notre bourgeoisie."⁸⁴ Sorel defended these diversions noting his conviction that: " . . . le monde actuel est condamné à la tristesse; il ne faut pas lui refuser les moyens qui sont à sa disposition pour éviter d'être submergé par la douleur."⁸⁵ Music had shown itself capable

⁸³Ibid., p. 415. " . . . enraged with speculation."

⁸⁴Ibid. "It seems probable to me that easy melodies to retain, adapted to farcical situations and endowed with an engaging rhythm will constitute for a long time the base of lyric art of our bourgeoisie."

⁸⁵Ibid. Sorel added: " . . . les poètes et les musiciens qui travaillent pour donner quelques instants de plaisirs aux travailleurs, peuvent rendre de très sérieux services à la civilisation en calmat des douleurs qui leur paraissent d'autant plus intolérables que l'éducation moderne a aiguisé leur sensibilité," p. 416. " . . . the present world is condemned to sadness; one must not refuse it the means which are at its disposition in order to avoid being submerged by suffering."

of reaching the masses and was no longer to be in the domain of the savants, but the plastic arts, as long as this term was applied exclusively to painting and sculpture, would remain, Sorel wrote, ". . . réservée à une infinie minorité."⁸⁶ Sorel rejected this narrow definition and insisted that the plastic arts must be given "un sens plus étendu que celui . . . qu'enseignent les écoles dites des Beaux-Arts."⁸⁷ He suggested that sports could be considered a modern extension of Greek gymnastics and thus should be considered as a kind of "esthétique populaire," which also served as ". . . des moyens inventés pour lutter contre la douleur."⁸⁸

Sorel proceeded to propose an even broader understanding of the term "plastic arts," suggesting that an artfully formed copper cooking pot could require more talent ". . . qu'un pompeux édifice élevé sur nos places publiques en l'honneur de quelque gloire nationale."⁸⁹ Manual labor employed for the needs of

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 417. ". . . a more expanded sense than that taught at schools called Beaux-Arts (fine arts)."

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 418. ". . . invented means to struggle against suffering."

⁸⁹Ibid. ". . . than a pompous edifice raised on our public places in honor of some national glory."

common life " . . . a le droit d'être rangé dans la même classe que les sculptures."⁹⁰ Those who possess creative genius, Sorel insisted, would feel a fraternal sympathy for the worker who had left modest monuments of incontestable value in the battle against "la douleur."

But the worker by division of labor had been reduced to the role of a beast and had tragically lost " . . . toute trace de sentiment artistique."⁹¹ For these, Sorel concluded "L'alcoolisme et l'érotisme furent les seules ressources qui restent à ces malheureux pour lutter contre la douleur."⁹² The solution, Sorel believed, was to encourage invention in the accomplishment of work and " . . . se rapproche de l'art."⁹³ The great opportunity for the present economic system was to "Faire que le travail manuel constitue, grâce à cette marche

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 419. " . . . has the right to be put in the same class as sculpture."

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid. "Alcoholism and eroticism were the sole resources that remain for these unhappy people to struggle against suffering."

⁹³Ibid., p. 420. " . . . to approximate art."

de la production vers l'art, le moyen par excellence que l'humanité emploiera désormais pour surmonter la douleur."⁹⁴

Lénine D'Après Gorki

Writing in La Revue communiste in January, 1922, Sorel recalled that Renan, at the end of his life, had wondered when Socialism after searching so long, ". . . réclamerait sa place au soleil."⁹⁵ The day had come, Sorel announced. Socialism which had seemed to so many critics to be incapable of directing the thinking of the masses had, Sorel wrote: ". . . aujourd'hui, grâce au bolchevisme, devenu un des facteurs principaux du mouvement historique actuel."⁹⁶ Lenin had come, noted Sorel quoting Gorki, ". . . comme un attila . . . pour détruire la Rome du bien-être et du confort bourgeois, basés sur l'esclavage, le sang et le

⁹⁴Ibid. "To make manual labor constitute (thanks to this move of production toward art) the means that humanity will employ henceforth to surmount suffering."

⁹⁵ Georges Sorel, "Lénine d'après Gorki," la Revue Communiste (Paris: Directeur, Charles Rappoport, January, 1921), pp. 401-13. ". . . would demand its place in the sun."

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 405. ". . . today, thanks to bolchevism, became one of the principal factors of the present historical movement."

pillage."⁹⁷ A capital point to note, Sorel insisted, was that Lenin had the taste for a temperate life; that he lived as simply and modestly in the Kremlin as he had lived when he had immigrated to Paris, and in this regard, Sorel affirmed: ". . . je crois que l'ascétisme a toujours été le principal caractère qui a désigné les saints au peuple."⁹⁸ The taste for the ascetic life, Sorel continued, ". . . le dévouement désintéressé à la cause des classes pauvres, la pitié sincère pour la misère humaine, sont des choses qui deviennent bien rares de nos jours; mais nous avons le droit de penser que, maintenant comme autrefois, ces qualités attirent aux hommes qui les possèdent, le respect admiratif de leurs semblables, le monde ne cesse pas de désirer que de tels héros lui indiquent la voie de sa libération."⁹⁹

⁹⁷Sorel quoted from Gorki's "Vladimir Ilütch Lenin" a brochure which L'Humanité had published in translation by André Pierre. No further publishing date or page references were given by Sorel. The quote appeared in "Lénine d'après Gorki," p. 409. ". . . like an Attila . . . in order to destroy Rome of well-being and bourgeois comfort, based on slavery, blood and pillage."

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 410. ". . . I believe that asceticism has always been the principal characteristic designating saints to the people."

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 413. ". . . the disinterested devotion to the cause of poor classes, and the sincere pity for human misery are the things that become very rare in our days; but we have the right to think that, now as formerly, these qualities attract in the men who possess them, the admiring respect of their fellow creatures, that the world does not cease desiring such heroes indicates to it the path of its liberation."

In 1921, Georges Sorel sold his small house in Boulogne and moved to a nearby apartment. Continuing financial need caused him to sell his personal library in 1922. At the age of 75 and in ill health he died on August 27, 1922.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰A more detailed accounting of these events can be found in Notre Maître, M. Sorel, Pierre Andreu, pp. 109-12.

APPENDIX A

FINAL WRITINGS: PRAGMATISM, PAIN,

AESTHETICS AND ASCETICS:

1914 - 1922

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GEORGES SOREL TO BENEDETTO CROCE:

1914 - 1921

ALL LETTERS FROM LA CRITICA, VOLUMES XXV, XXVI, XXVII,
XXVIII, XXIX (1927 - 1931)

23 septembre 1914

"J'ai quitté ma maison comme beaucoup d'autres, sur les conseils de gens autorisés. . . . Les événements m'accablent: je sens que nous entrons dans une ère plus nouvelle que n'a été celle de la Révolution . . . l'Europe entière est occupée à rejeter ce qui lui restait des institutions que Renan aimait; les politiciens jacobins, les financiers et les noceurs des grandes métropoles ne trouveront plus aucune force vivante qui leur reproche leur bassesse. La vieille Prusse qui se sentait absorbée par la nouvelle Allemagne industrielle me semble vouloir mourir au milieu des flots de sang; nous allons revoir quelque chose d'analogue à la guerre de Judée: quel sera le poète, l'historien ou le philosophe de cette effroyable catastrophe? . . . Je suis un homme du passé, je n'ai plus rien à dire à des hommes qui vont pouvoir affirmer hautement leurs principes jacobins." p. 51

26 octobre 1914

"En général les terribles événements actuels n'ont provoqué qu'une littérature misérable . . . la position de Cournot comme métaphysicien me semble fort difficile à bien préciser; son probabilisme pourrait bien être une forme de pragmatisme. . . . il me semble que la guerre actuelle aura, entre autres résultats, de liquider le socialisme qui n'a pu rien dire d'original." p. 52

14 novembre 1914

"Le grand problème actuel est bien probablement celui que vous indiquez dans votre lettre: "Vivre sans religion"; l'histoire paraît montrer que cela est possible, . . . mais l'art et la philosophie ne sont-ils pas gravement compromis par la ruine des religions

populaires? . . . j'ai peur en effet, que l'influence de Bergson soit passagère chez nous. . . . Je suis effrayé en constatant la nullité de ce que cette guerre fait écrire et je me demande si la philosophie n'a pas besoin d'une base populaire, artistique et religieuse, que nous manque totalement." p. 114

28 novembre 1914

"Ce sera un fait bien digne d'attirer les esprits philosophiques de l'avenir que l'extrême contradiction qui existe entre les prodigieux événements actuels et la littérature qu'ils font naître. Maurice Barrès est chez nous un remarquable exemple de ce contraste: car il n'y a pas d'homme moins accessible aux sentiments tragiques." p. 115

19 janvier 1915

"Avez-vous lu le discours de notre président du Sénat Dubost, qui veut supprimer tous les despotismes en Europe!! Nous sommes revenus au Directorre." p. 117

30 janvier 1915

"Ici nous vivons dans la caverne de Platon; la censure ne laisse rien passer; . . . L'avenir est immensément sombre; qu'est devenue cette fameuse 'opinion publique' qui était censée gouverner le monde? Il y a moins d'opinion publique que sous Louis XV. D'ailleurs, à quoi bon une opinion publique dans une démocratie? Les élus sont les seuls qui aient à penser." p. 117

8 avril 1915

". . . nous vivons dans un monde d'intrigues misérables; il faudra beaucoup de temps pour qu'on puisse clouer les événements actuels à leur place historique; la littérature engendrée par cette guerre est d'une platitude extrême. . . . D'Annunzio est plein de génie à coté de Barrès, qui n'a même pas l'émotion de l'artiste." p. 120

28 juillet 1915

"Elémir Bourges explique l'art moderne en disant que nous sommes devenus 'satanistes'; nous admirons les horreurs du sabbat après avoir admiré les anges d'Angelico. . . . En général, les événements actuels me semblent annoncer le sommeil intellectuel de l'Europe." p. 122

18 juillet 1915

"Il me semble que l'heure actuelle est celle de la révolte universelle des esclaves." p. 123

1 septembre 1915

" . . . Dans la révolte si générale qui se produit aujourd'hui en France et en Italie contre tout ce qui est germanique, on retrouve beaucoup d l'esprit qui animait après 1815 les conservateurs de l'esprit gaulois, voltairien et bourgeois. La guerre actuelle assurera probablement pour très longtemps le triomphe de cet esprit--comme la guerre de 1813-1815 avait contribué notablement à le faire mépriser par les romantiques. . . . L'enthousiasme avec lequel nos socialistes ont accueilli la guerre montre qu'eux aussi sentaient le besoin de se retremper dans le vieux fleuve de la 'latinité bourgeoise' . . . " p. 4

26 septembre 1915

"La belle civilisation néo-latine se résont tout bonnement en une exploitation de foules aveugles par des côteries d'avocats, de gens de plume et d'hommes d'intrigues. . . . L'histoire de l'italie contemporaine ne me semgle pas rassurante. . . . Je ne vois aucun indice permettant de supposer que nous soyons capables d'éventer la domination des intellectuels qui ruinent notre patrie: on pourrait même se demander so notre victoire n'accroitra pas leur tyrannie.

. . . le monde sem le n'avoir pas encore assez de sang. J mais on ne vit une telle soif de carnages chez les gouvernements et autant de servilisme chez les peuples qui se laissent entrainer dans des guerres dont la fin s'éloigne chaque jour." pp. 292-93

5 novembre 1915

"Les affaires ne semblent pas aller très bien pour nous; je n'aime pas beaucoup les fanfaronnades, surtout dans un moment où tant de monde souffre de tant de devils. Il parait que l'affaire de Champagne nous a couté 110.000 tués et blessés, dont 30.000 tués à peu près; le résultat est regardé par les officiers sérieux comme insignifiant." p. 293

24 novembre 1915

" . . . il semble vraiment que cette guerre soit destinée à libérer tous les instincts de grossièreté qui étaient accumulés dans l'humanité depuis un siècle." p. 294

5 décembre 1915

" . . . la guerre produit dans toutes les cervelles bourgeoises un grand dérangement. . . . Cette guerre montre dans les peuples plus de résignation que d'héroïsme; tous les Européens sont en train de devenir semblables à des Asiatiques qui se font tuer quand on le leur commande. . . . On me dit que les socialistes

espèrent tirer de grands avantages de cette guerre. C'est très possible, car il est probable que partout un certain socialisme gagnera du terrain; partout en effet, il a fallu, pour les besoins de la guerre, monopoliser des commerces importants; le souvenir de cela demeura très-fort dans le peuple pendant longtemps . . .

. . . la presse est non seulement soumise à une censure sévère, mais encore appartient en partie à des groupes de gens d'affaires ayant intérêt à la prolongation de la guerre. Les fournisseurs militaires gagnent tant d'argent qu'ils peuvent en dépenser un peu pour entretenir les journaux." pp. 295-96

9 janvier 1916

" . . . Les gens qui parlent du droit international soit vraiment bien amusants." p. 354

28 janvier 1916

" . . . il est drôle de voir aujourd'hui les franc-maçons de France et d'Italie demander au pape de s'ériger en juge européen. . . . Il y a quelques années l'abbé Vacondoid publiait . . . ses Études de critique et d'histoire religieuse . . . ; dans laquelle . . . il aurait notamment reconnu que les papes n'ont pas à juger les souverains pour leurs abus de pouvoir et leurs dominations injustes. Voilà donc les franc-maçons qui deviennent untramontains parce qu'ils sont scolastiques." p. 355

26 février 1916

"Barrès est horriblement creux et bavard; Claudel est un arrangeur de phrases (obscurès à dessin) dans lesquelles il y a peu de choses. . . . il ne faut pas écrire quand on n'a rien à dire à ses contemporains." p. 355

26 mars 1916

" . . . J'ai peur qu'en Italie règne la culte de l'insanité de l'homme du monde comme chez nous." p. 356

5 avril 1916

" . . . il faut bien se rendre compte que Renan n'était pas dans le mouvement démocratique, libre-penseur et maçonnique. Ici il est évident que tous les changements que l'on pouvait croire acquis par l'influence de Renan et de Taine sont définitivement perdus; nous sommes revenus à l'intellectualisme du XVIIIe siècle." p. 357

21 mai 1916

" . . . ici Descartes est dieu et son cult est encore rajeuni par le besoin que nos professeurs éprouvent d'affirmer la culture exclusivement française. Je crains fort que Bergson ne soit destiné à demeurer étranger aux idées historique son education universitaire le condamne à accepter les blagues du droit naturel; j'ai constaté que la notion historique du droit lui est tout à fait étrangère. Vous avez en I alie l'avantage d'avoir en Vico." p. 357

8 juillet 1916

"On est arrivé dans ce monde à identifier la réaction cléricale et l'Allemagne, en sorte que la victoire de l'Entente est déjà escomptée comme le triomphe de la civilisation libre-penseuse. Cette manifestation me semble bien caractériser la question idéologique actuelle; nous revenons, pour un siècle et peut-être pour plus longtemps encore, aux insanités de la bourgeoisie voltairienne. Je ne vois pas quelle force pourrait s'opposer à cette renaissance de ce qu'il y a de plus malsain dans l'héritage du XVIIIe siècle." p. 359

7 octobre 1916

"Il semble bien que dans la médiévale Italie, comme en Grèce, l'art a eu pour condition d'existence des républiques d'artisans que le régime moderne devait transformer en masses ouvrières gagnant leur vie par des industries qu'entre tiennent de riches et fastueuses oligarchies." p. 360

5 novembre 1916

"Quelques personnes croient que ce (les socialistes) sont eux qui tireront seuls quelques profits de cette guerre." p. 438

16 novembre 1916

"Je vous remercie des deux volumes de Freitschke que vous avez eu l'obligeance de me faire envoyer (Croce's note: La Francia dal Primo Impero al 1871); ils me paraissent pleins d'observations justes sur l'état des esprits en France de 1825 à 1870." p. 439

10 janvier 1917

" . . . Nous ne marchons sûrement pas vers l'Etat hégélien, mais vers l'Etat jacobin, jésuitique et plutocratique . . . à l'heure actuelle les relations historiques se dissolvent . . . le libéralisme supposait un régime respectueux des droits que l'individu peut avoir à soutenir; l'idée de droit

meurt sous les coups de la démocratie triomphante dans le monde entier. . . . les libéraux croient-ils encore au droit? J'en doute." p. 141

20 janvier 1917

"S'il n'est pas impossible que se produise une réforme intellectuelle et morale dans une société bouleversée, il est entendu qu'un tel résultat ne peut-être obtenu que si les peuples acceptent de suivre une voie de pénitence, comme l'avait déclaré Renan en 1871. Or à l'heure actuelle je ne vois nulle part de signe annonçant qu'on veuille se corriger des défauts qu'on a le plus aimés; tout au contraire, on exalte ces défauts comme des qualités supérieurs de la civilisation latine. . . . L'absence universelle de sincérité, d'examen de conscience et par suite de désir de pénitence seront les traits incontestables et effrayants de notre civilisation de demain." p. 442

24 janvier 1917

". . . Je pense que les Instituts français d'Italie n'ont pas dû contribuer à répandre les idées de Bergson, car ici les universitaires ne leur sont pas favorables." p. 442

28 mars 1917

"Ne pensez-vous pas que Bergson pourrait bien être un solaro maestro' de Schopenhauer: il me semble que l'Evolution créatrice est un essai de conciliation de la doctrine de la 'Volonté' et du 'Jahvéisme'; cette conciliation est plus facile à effectuer que celle de la Volonté et du christianisme, qui a une notion de Dieu beaucoup plus précise que celle des Juifs.

. . . Je suis frappé de la haine que William James avait avouée à Hégel; cela devait te ir à une incompatibilité existant entre les idées hégéliennes et le tempérament américain, toujours disposé à se contenter d'aperçus sommaires, 'sans notion du mal,' très-peu porté vers la réflexion historique (les américains n'ont pas, en effet, d'histoire propre)." p. 443

16 avril 1917

". . . De tous les oeuvres de Proudhon, celle qui est la plus facile de comprendre aujourd'hui, . . . est La guerre et la paix. Puisque toutes ses idées essentielles s'y trouvent." p. 443

juillet 1917 (incomplete date in la Critica)

". . . Plus la guerre se prolonge et plus l'avenir intellectuel de l'Europe me semble menacé. Je ne

crois pas que beaucoup de personnes aient jusqu'ici reconnu ce danger d'une longue dépression philosophique." p. 445

21 juillet 1917

"Tout ce qui se passe me montre que l'intelligence subit une éclipse." p. 446

15 août 1917

"Mais qu'aujourd'hui il y a bien peu de catholiques vraiment chrétiens. Je crois que Huysmans était plus sincèrement chrétien que Claudel: la fond de sa religion était la musique grégorienne; mais cette musique entretenait chez lui des sentiments élevés." p. 446

7 septembre 1917

"Hier j'ai rencontré Bergson qui a reconnu que la philosophie moderne souffrait beaucoup de la séparation absolue qui s'est établie entre elle et l'art; il n'en était pas ainsi chez les Grecs; si les scolastiques ont si mal compris Aristote souvent, cela tient, je crois, en bonne partie, à ce qu'ils n'avaient aucun sens de l'art. Descartes n'est pas non plus du tout artiste." p. 42

17 septembre 1917

"Beaucoup de catholiques actuels pensent que, la confession lavant tous les péchés, la morale n'est obligatoire que pour les pieux gens qui se tiennent en dehors de l'Eglise; les dévots ont le droit de tout oser, pourvu qu'ils affirment leur croyance aux sacrements." p. 43

25 octobre 1917

"On vient de traduire en français un livre d'un professeur de Harvard: L'erreur de la philosophie allemande (Egotisme in German Philosophy) par Santayana. . . . Cets ouvrage me semble indiquer une tendance 'irrésistible' qui va entraîner la philosophie vers un journalisme qui soit à la portée des boutiquiers, lecteurs des feuilles avancées. . . . L'Europe serait-elle mûre pour recevoir la grande pensée américaine: 'mediums et christian science?' p. 43

9 décembre 1917

"Allons-nous voir la pensée européenne tomber au niveau de la pensée américaine et la spiritisme devenir une métaphysique? J'en ai grand peur!" p. 43

5 février 1918

"Le voyage à Sparte de Barrès est bien propre à montrer que cet éducateur du nationalisme est un bourgeois incapable de comprendre la grandeur antique; il correspond très-bien aux tendances de la France moderne qui n'est plus ni classique, ni chrétienne." p. 44

15 mai 1918

"Les événements de Russie me semblent constituer les funérailles du socialisme que nous avaient fait les déclamateurs bourgeois depuis une vingtaine d'années." p. 45

6 décembre 1918

" . . . ici il n'y a que le vide le plus absolu de la pensée. . . . Nous entrons dans la période la plus haïssable de toute décennie, celle de la pure ploutocratie, à l'américaine. . . . J'ai appris par un jeune officier d'état-major que les Américains ignorent généralement l'existence de W. James, le seul philosophe américain dont le nom avait traversé l'océan.

Les catholiques français croient que cette guerre va assurer le triomphe de leur esprit sur l'esprit protestant (c'est-à-dire de Goethe, Kant, Hegel);" p. 48

20 décembre 1918

"La grande question est celle-ci: que représente aujourd'hui l'Allemagne en Europe? Je crois qu'on s'est beaucoup trompé en supposant que l'Empire allemand représentait l'oligarchie militaire; il me semble que l'empereur Guillaume était le chef des capitalistes; au fond la défaite n'a pas atteint autant les allemands qu'on aurait pu le croire, parce que c'est la bourgeoisie capitaliste qui est vaincue; les Junkers ont encore bon espoir." p. 48

1 février 1919

"Le problème que je pose est très-grave; à quelle philosophie le socialisme va-t-il se rattacher pour profiter des expériences redoutables d'aujourd'hui?

Je serais bien heureux d'avoir votre avis sur l'avenir du bolchevisme, considéré comme une institution propre à la Russie. Ici la censure supprime tous les renseignements relatifs à la Russie . . . " p. 50

21 février 1919

" . . . nos socialistes français sont des hommes d'affaires . . . " p. 51

16 août 1918

" . . . je crois que nous allons très-rapidement au XVIIIe siècle, sans, cependant, que nos écrivains aient rien du style de Voltaire. Ce sera le chef d'oeuvre de l'esprit bourgeois." p. 119

29 septembre 1919

"Le génie de Barrès est un dogme accepté par tous les 'partis de l'intelligence.' . . . L'intelligence française 'organisée' est d'une espèce très-mauvaise." p. 120

20 mars 1920

" . . . l'idée de création occupe dans sa (Bergson) philosophie une place plus grance que ne le dit l'auteur (Malavasi sur l'Esthétique bergsonienne) de l'article. Je crois que la musique est l'art que Bergson comprend le mieux et cet art est tout de création; il m'imite pas la nature." p. 190

11 avril 1920

" . . . Je me demande comment on peut parler de l'âme sans faire appel à chaque instant à l'expérience. Les philosophes se sont imaginés qu'ils pourraient s'élever au dessus de la psychologie, parce qu'ils ont prodigieusement appauvri les sujets qu'ils traitaient. Et je suis persuadé que dans le plus grand nombre des cas, le rationalisme est un amincissement de la réalité.

. . . Je crois que Bergson a bien raison d'abandonner les sphères où se renferment les philosophes qui parlent de l'âme, pour faire appel à l'expérience. Je trouve ses conceptions de la conscience-mémoire irréfutables; mais je me demande s'il a démontré (dans Matière et mémoire) que la conscience dépasse les limites du corps. Sur ce point l'expérience peut seule nous instruire; Aristote ne mettait pas en doute que l'âme est une manière d'être des corps organisés et, en conséquence, il n'admettait pas l'immortalité, qu'il regardait probablement comme une superstition antique . . .

. . . à mon avis, il est très probable que Bergson a été fort influencé par des écrits de Schopenhauer." p. 191

13 août 1920

"J'ai lu avec beaucoup d'intérêt votre critique d'Oswald Spengler. . . . Tous les sociologues ont eu pour ambition de pouvoir faire de telles prédéterminations en s'appuyant sur les données du passé. Que telles conceptions aient eu du succès en Allemagne, cela prouve que beaucoup d'Allemands actuels se mettent à la reporque du 'scientisme' anglo-français.

Les affaires européen ne semblent pas encore s'orienter vers la paix; il y a trop de gens qui croient avoir intérêt à brouiller les cartes. . . . il n'y a plus trace de bonne foi dans le monde socialiste officiel; le gouvernement peut acheter les socialistes comme les maguignons achètent des boeufs. . . . Ceux-ci ont une peur effroyable du 'bolchévisme' qu'ils redoutent de voir gagner de l'importance chez les prolétaires. . . . Ce qu'il y a de plus triste c'est la décadence des intelligenses." p. 193

25 mars 1921

"J'ai été très-souffrant dans ces derniers temps, le coeur marche d'une façon désordonnée quand j'éprouve quelque fatigue, même intellectuelle." p. 194

8 juillet 1921

"Nulle part il n'y a de réforme intellectuelle en Europe. Quel triste avenir nous avons devant nous! Il est vrai que j'acheve mes 74 ans et que avec ma maladie de coeur, je ne puis pas avoir beaucoup d'années à vivre; je ne verrai pas les plus mauvais jours." p. 195

26 août 1921

"Les temps étant devenu plus doux, je me sens moins fatigué; mais je ne peux pas entreprendre grand travail exigeant une longue préparation." p. 195

A FOREWORD TO CHAPTER IX

Without attempting to judge the moral, historical or social value of Sorel's mind, Chapter IX offers a concluding vision of the structure and unity of the thought of Georges Sorel. The results are then placed in the context of the major secondary accounts of Sorel's ideas, which are reviewed in Part 2 of this concluding chapter. The call for a re-evaluation of Georges Sorel is the consequence of the conclusions set forth in Chapter IX. These conclusions represent an interpretation of Sorel's thought which is unduplicated in, and in many instances contradictory of, the major secondary accounts of his thought. The concluding bibliography of Sorel's writings, upon which these conclusions are based, is the most complete list of his works which has been compiled.

CHAPTER IX

REFLECTIONS ON GEORGES SOREL

Part 1

Conclusions

Epistemology, defined as that branch of human inquiry which is concerned with the problems of the nature, limits and validity of knowledge and belief, forms the central and most persistent concern in the intellectual preoccupations of Georges Sorel. I do not believe, based on an analysis of his writings, that it would be possible to understand his speculations on science, sociology, history, pessimism, tradition, language or myth-fabrication, without a thorough comprehension of his epistemological judgments. As early as 1894, Sorel made the observation that all the formations of the human mind had a "subjective and psychological aspect"¹ and he reasoned that the desire for complete knowledge must be abandoned. The cosmos, he observed, appeared to be unlimited, in that he could not

¹Georges Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 62.

conceptualize its end, but the realm of human knowledge seemed to be confined to precisely the activities of human beings.² It was in the realm of human creations, which Sorel referred to as the artificial or man-made milieu, that the cooperative aggrandizement of human knowledge was possible.³ The influence of Henri Bergson, who had emphasized the emotional side of human life, led Sorel to conclude that human affairs and therefore human knowledge itself even within the context of the artificial milieu would necessarily be characterized by indeterminism.⁴

Writing in 1896, Sorel distinguished two categories of human knowledge, naming the first "formal or abstract" and the second "living and concrete."⁵ Thinkers had been overly impressed with geometry and logic because of their great prestige in Greek philosophy, Sorel thought, and this had led to a predisposition to believe that syllogisms and abstractions marked the most elevated and perfect systems of knowledge. But these systems belonged to the artificial milieu and not to the cosmic.⁶ Sorel

²Ibid., p. 267.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 179.

⁵Georges Sorel, "la science dans l'éducation," p. 111.

⁶Ibid., p. 136.

concluded that these so-called scientific systems were an admirable collection of ruses which contained an anthropocentric hypothesis.⁷ As a result of this prejudice, the "true" had become defined as an ensemble of clear and distinct propositions bound together by logic. This ensemble was placed between humanity and the "nature" which it claimed to depict. But in nature, which Sorel designated as the natural milieu to distinguish it from the man-made, artificial milieu, there existed a complexity so extraordinary that it could not be deciphered. The error of attempting to subordinate this unknowable to the caprices of the human imagination could only be overcome through an education which did not conceal the epistemological limitations of the human mind.⁸ The process of the cumulative increase of human knowledge was confined to the artificial milieu, to which successive generations of humanity had contributed. The natural milieu, which Sorel referred to as "le monde cosmique" could never be known by mankind in any certainty.

In 1905, Sorel observed that the epistemological limitations of human knowledge had caused certain anxieties in contemporary physics.⁹ The impossibility of

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 221.

⁹Georges Sorel, "Les préoccupations des physiciens modernes." See also Chapter IV, note 82.

acquiring a knowledge of the essence of things was causing a recognition among scientists that mathematics was a system of images situated between phenomena and the physicist and that these images by means of which reality was represented were chosen because of their convenience and simplicity. This use of an "aesthetic standard" caused Sorel to agree with Henri Poincaré who suggested that the world the scientist believed he had discovered was the creation of his own caprice.¹⁰ Sorel concluded that all hypotheses introduced a system which was foreign to the natural milieu and that it was an error to conceal the necessary contradiction between science and nature.¹¹ He speculated that the natural and the artificial milieux were constructed according to "des principes opposés" and that this opposition would become more clear as science advanced toward the sense of its own ignorance.¹² In a letter to Benedetto Croce, Sorel observed: "Je ne crois pas que le physicien lui-même puisse se dispenser d'être quelque peu philosophe."¹³

¹⁰Ibid., p. 864. See also Chapter IV, note 85.

¹¹Ibid., p. 880. See also Chapter IV, note 87.

¹²Ibid., p. 882. See also Chapter IV, note 89.

¹³Letter to Croce, 6 mai 1907.

Sorel observed in 1906 that in every complex body of human knowledge he detected both clear and obscure regions, and he rejected the assumption that an advance in knowledge would be marked by a gradual disappearance of the obscure region.¹⁴ On the contrary, he insisted that the obscure region might prove to be the more important. Rejecting the position of those whom he called false philosophers who sought unity in all things, Sorel stated his belief in the "fundamental heterogeneity" of all things.¹⁵ The advance of human knowledge, Sorel believed, would have the effect of increasing human awareness of a perpetually enlarging domain of the unknown.¹⁶ Even within the human-made artificial milieu, Sorel insisted in an essay written in 1909, the movement of human things was itself far too complicated to allow for predictability--the future was necessarily unknown, and those who ventured to predict futures were overreaching the epistemological possibilities of human knowledge.¹⁷

¹⁴Georges Sorel, "La Grève générale," p. 288. See also Chapter V, note 41.

¹⁵Georges Sorel, "La moralité de la violence," p. 99. See also Chapter V, note 57.

¹⁶Georges Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice" (Jan., 1908), p. 51. See also Chapter V, note 123.

¹⁷Georges Sorel, "La religion d'aujourd'hui," p. 441. See also Chapter VI, note 54.

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By 1910, Sorel was convinced that it was an error to think of philosophy as a science and to submit thought to the domination of logic as he believed Greek philosophers had done.¹⁸ The complete failure of John Stuart Mill's nineteenth century attempt to produce canons of induction to govern the methods of rational experiments had demonstrated that it was useless for philosophy to claim to direct the activities of scientific investigation. The most symmetrical philosophical systems, he charged, had often served to obstruct the mind, and he renounced philosophy's traditional quest for truth in favor of speculation which while incomplete and obscure might better serve to provoke creativity and a spirit of invention.¹⁹ The modern world would commit a grave error, Sorel warned, if it continued to follow the Greek traditions which supposed that human understanding could separate essences from accidents because the human observer and his instruments were both " . . . très chargé de variations accidentelles."²⁰ Between the artificial milieu of human works and observations and the natural milieu there was what Sorel called a lacuna,

¹⁸ Georges Sorel, "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie," p. 581. See also Chapter VI, notes 55, 56.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 593. See also Chapter VI, note 64.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 82. See also Chapter VI, note 70.

and the idea of unity, Sorel concluded " . . . que l'on a regardée pendant si longtemps comme étant fondamentale dans la constitution de la science, n'aurait plus de raison d'être."²¹

The most significant influence of Henri Bergson on the thought of Georges Sorel was in the area of the formation of his epistemological convictions. Sorel recognized Bergson's place in the history of epistemology by ranking his Creative Evolution as comparable in importance to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.²² Bergson to Sorel was that genius who, faced with the contradictions of nineteenth century thought, had produced an insight which allowed the old dogmatics to die and which oriented contemporary thought in new directions. Bergson had, Sorel believed, reproached the Greek philosophers for their exaggerated confidence in the power of the individual mind, and emphasized instead the limited and cumulative nature of human understanding. The occupation of philosophy, Bergson taught, was not to seek a unique, total, global vision, but rather to meditate on the mysteries of life.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 86. See also Chapter VI, note 71.

²²Ibid., p. 89. See also Chapter VI, note 72.

²³Ibid., p. 98. See also Chapter VI, note 73.

In 1911, Sorel was influenced by Gustave LeBon (Les opinions et les croyances) to conceptualize an epistemological duality which both a study of history and psychology seemed to confirm: the human mind, Sorel wrote, ". . . est condamnée à subir éternellement la dualité de la croyance et de la connaissance."²⁴ He rejected what he called the "fallacieuse métaphysique" which assumed that rationalism would gradually eliminate human credulity and proposed instead that human certainty resided upon a combination of knowledge and the will to believe and thus he concluded that the mentally more satisfying constructions could be shown to have "des racines puissantes dans le coeur."²⁵ Several months later, Sorel announced what he believed to be a conception of truth which he found compatible with this duality: "the pragmatic truth of certain ideas, he wrote, was demonstrated by those ideas which could be shown to have produced "féconde et grands résultats."²⁶ These pragmatic truths, which Sorel believed abounded in human history, were not verifiable by any scientific demonstrations. Their validity, he believed, could only be

²⁴ Georges Sorel, "Sur la magie moderne," p. 4. See also Chapter VII, note 26.

²⁵ Ibid. See also Chapter VII, note 29.

²⁶ Georges Sorel, "Si les dogmes évoluent," p. 38. See also Chapter VII, note 33.

discovered in retrospect. Verifiability he envisioned as determined by historical experience. It was precisely the failing of contemporary science, Sorel argued, to have paid insufficient attention to these realities contained in history and experience and he praised Antoine Cournot for having attacked the artificial categories of "unity" and "infinity" as ". . . cartes métaphysiques, dressées avec symètre et élégance."²⁷ The human mind, Sorel concluded, constructed special systems for each genre of knowledge and he called upon historians to launch a critique of rationalism which was the prerequisite for a comprehensive epistemological reorientation: "Une critique satisfaisante de la connaissance ne pouvait être tentée avant que le prestige ancien du rationalisme n'eût été abaissé par les historiens."²⁸ This reorientation would involve a historical examination of the philosophy of language and all the religious, political and judicial institutions by which human life manifested itself. Cournot had coined the term "trans-rationalisme" to suggest the direction of his epistemological considerations. Sorel opted instead for the label "pragmatisme" to designate a new union between reason and experience.

²⁷ Georges Sorel, "A la mémoire de Cournot," p. 103. See also Chapter VII, note 40.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 111. See also Chapter VII, note 42.

Pragmatism, Sorel wrote in 1917, was born of the need to protest against the superstition of the dialectic.²⁹ The true definition of an idea or principle resided, according to the pragmatic system, in its practical effects. The truth was thus conceived as a relationship between an idea and a reality exterior to the idea which composed a matrix of psychological and physical dimensions. The pragmatist proposed to verify ideas, Sorel wrote, "by a process which subordinated the experience to the conditions in the mind of the perceiver."³⁰ This process, Sorel asserted, rejected the unitary interpretation of reality and provided instead for ". . . plusieurs genres de réalités."³¹ The pragmatic conception of truth, Sorel concluded, accepted ". . . que la relation de vérité est une relation susceptible d'expérience définie et par conséquent, susceptible d'être décrite aussi bien que nommée, qu'elle n'est pas unique en son genre et qu'elle n'est ni invariable ni universelle."³²

²⁹ Georges Sorel, De l'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 4. See also Chapter VIII, note 15.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 81. See also Chapter VIII, note 20.

³¹ Ibid. See also Chapter VIII, note 21.

³² Ibid., p. 173. See also Chapter VIII, note 24.

The pragmatist recognized that the world of human construction--the artificial milieu--was an object of epistemological concern of at least equal importance to that of the natural milieu, and Sorel criticized the prejudices of "the spiritualists" who concentrated on the unknown (the natural milieu) to the exclusion of the artificial milieu, and "the materialists" who had made a dogma of " . . . la raison immanente qui soutient, croient-ils, le cours de l'Univers."³³

Sorel concluded his epistemological observations by speculating that the natural and the artificial milieux were separated by something " . . . chargé d'irréversibilité";³⁴ a zone of separation which was not susceptible to the laws of mathematics and which appeared to be characterized by indetermination. Those physicists who held to the doctrine of perfect determinism in nature, whose present difficulty of proof for them was the result of a temporary ignorance, Sorel scorned as devotees to a "fanatisme moniste."³⁵ The pragmatist, Sorel believed, had no interest in favoring a position which held that determinism was hidden within indeterminism, because it appeared an hypocrisy to obscure the limits of the human

³³Ibid., p. 338. See also Chapter VIII, note 38.

³⁴Ibid., p. 341. See also Chapter VIII, note 40.

³⁵Ibid., p. 347. See also Chapter VIII, note 42.

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mind. The only true given which existed in the history of science, Sorel affirmed, was " . . . la nature artificielle à laquelle nous ne cessons d'ajouter chaque jour."³⁶ The advance of human knowledge was an advance into the unknown which produced quantitatively greater awareness while at the same time served to increase the sense of relative ignorance. It was by careful reflection on the course of the development of this artificial nature that the human mind could become aware of the extent to which humanity was capable of effecting the course of its own development. The natural milieu whose phenomena, Sorel believed, " . . . nous ne pourrons jamais soumettre complètement . . . à notre intelligence," he warned, represented a threat to the works of man, and only by an incessant labor could humanity provide itself with the means to maintain what Sorel regarded as its zone of relative freedom--the artificial milieu. Thus Sorel praised the epistemological insight of Henri Bergson who had taught that human intelligence was necessarily collective and progressive³⁷ and he concluded that history would become the great regulator of human mental activity with the result that " . . . celui qui se place au point de vue des historiens, n'admettra plus de théories

³⁶Ibid., p. 350. See also Chapter VIII, note 45.

³⁷Ibid., p. 446. See also Chapter VIII, note 53.

extra-expérimentales de la physique, de droit naturel, de philosophie permanente; l'humanité construit des doctrines dont la valeur est constatée par l'utilité qu'on leur reconnaît au cours d'une longue expérience; nous sommes ainsi amenés au pragmatisme."³⁸

Contained within a world of its own construction, Sorel visualized humanity as constantly faced with the enormous task of maintaining what the generations had acquired in the face of an unknown and threatening natural milieu which was in dogged opposition to its projects. In this context, optimism seemed an unrealistic perspective of false confidence. A pessimism which would alert humanity to the fragile condition of its life and conquests was for Sorel a necessary precondition for human survival. In 1889, writing in The Trial of Socrates, he contrasted the noble pessimism of the ancient Greek warrior kings with the facile and dangerous optimism of the fifth century schools of the Sophists. In contrast the Greek poetry, which he admired so greatly, contained an essence of melancholy which signaled to the ancient Greeks that even in the midst of their most brilliant triumphs they must anticipate a reversal of fortune:

" . . . Si le malheur est toujours prêt à nous frapper,

³⁸Ibid., p. 462. See also Chapter VIII, note 54.

si le bonheur complet est une illusion décevante, le monde n'en est pas moins aussi excellent et aussi parfait que possible."³⁹

In Proudhon's la guerre et la paix, Sorel discovered further support for his early conception of pessimism as a necessary posture with respect to the conditions of human life. Writing in 1892 in reference to Proudhon, Sorel noted that there existed in the human constitution what he called "un défaut d'équilibre." The faculty for consumption according to Sorel was unlimited in humanity, but that of production was not.⁴⁰ The drive for a constant increase in happiness, so long as it was defined in terms of the acquisition of material wealth and increasing levels of consumption therefore appeared to Sorel to be destined to failure. The pessimistic view of life which Sorel advanced to counter the false faith of the optimist, who assumed boundless supplies of material wealth, was based on his conception that pain and suffering (la douleur) was "la manifestation primordiale de la vie . . . qui nous fournit la preuve irrefutable (pour la conscience) de notre mélange au monde physique, qui nous demontre à la fois notre

³⁹Sorel, le procès de Socrate, p. 217. See also Chapter I, Part 2, note 87.

⁴⁰Georges Sorel, "Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon," p. 629.

existence et l'existence du monde."⁴¹ The state of pleasure, Sorel emphasized in an essay published in 1900, separated humanity from reality and caused the belief that all in life existed for the purpose of producing amusement. Philosophies founded exclusively on considerations of enhancing pleasure, Sorel charged, ended by glorifying passion and sanctifying individual cynicism. In a speech delivered on January 30, 1900, Sorel reaffirmed that he considered a pessimistic sentiment to be of primary efficacy: ". . . Au premier rang des sentiments efficaces, je place ceux qui se rapportent à la conception pessimiste des futurs."⁴² Sorel believed the historical example of Christianity had demonstrated the strength of a pessimism which visualized the world as the natural realm of evil. This pessimism, according to Sorel, had far greater influence in behalf of Christianity's growth and endurance than did its more optimistic ideas of sublime charity. He concluded that social theories would have less influence on the human mind if they were fundamentally optimistic.⁴³

⁴¹ Georges Sorel, "la science et la morale," p. 18. See also Chapter III, note 24.

⁴² Georges Sorel, "Les facteurs moraux de l'évolution," p. 94. See also Chapter III, note 29.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 94. See also Chapter III, note 29.

Writing in September, 1901, Sorel revealed an almost existential analysis of the roots of his pessimism, while discussing a novel by Antonini Lavergne entitled Jean Coste. Civilization, Sorel wrote, had been recognized by Jean Coste to be a system of ruses which prevented self-examination. The mysteries which remained hidden in the soul were only revealed by contact with "la misère," whose impact caused the superficial structure of life to fall away.⁴⁴ The internal strength of each man was measured in those moments of crisis when, alone, each confronted all which was horrible and inexorable in human existence. Coste's speculations on suicide represented for Sorel his courage without any concealing illusion to consider the fatality of life. This was, Sorel wrote, "l'affreuse pensée" which caused him to reaffirm that "le hasard est grand maître en ce monde."⁴⁵

Writing in 1910 in an essay entitled "Grandeur et décadence," Sorel reiterated his conviction that chance played an important role in determining that some epochs would be characterized by grandeur and others by decadence. He visualized a cycle of growth and decline in human development which he believed operated according to what

⁴⁴ Georges Sorel, Jean Coste, p. 296. See also Chapter IV, notes 37, 39.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 297. See also Chapter IV, note 41.

he called a "law of apparent regression."⁴⁶ This law recognized the great power " . . . qui appartient à la médiocrité dans l'histoire."⁴⁷ Humanity was occasionally lifted out of its natural state of mediocrity only under the pressure of the most energetic constraint, but there was, he insisted, a natural tendency to return to a mediocre state which Sorel labeled "ses propres tendances." Writing to Croce on January 25, 1911, Sorel referred to these conclusions which he had added to a new edition of his Illusions du progrès: "I hope you will glance at the chapter which I have added to The Illusions of Progress; I believe to have opened a fecond avenue for philosophical research on history by showing that movements toward grandeur are always forced and those toward decadence are always natural; our nature is invincibly born toward that which the philosophers of history regard as evil, barbaric or decadent."⁴⁸

Following the first world war, in 1919, Sorel chided the leaders of the Entente who had promised a universal happiness to those who had suffered from the carnage of combat. To the promise that "rivers of milk

⁴⁶ Georges Sorel, "Grandeur et décadence," p. 332. See also Chapter VII, note 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid. See also Chapter VII, note 9.

⁴⁸ Letter to Croce 25 janvier 1911.

and honey would flow" and to the resulting popular hope that life might become easy, Sorel contrasted his conviction that humanity was engaged in a constant struggle against a natural law which condemned it to pain and suffering and uncertainty (*la douleur*) and which he identified as ". . . les problèmes essentiels de notre espèce."⁴⁹

The human condition, as Sorel envisioned it, was epistemologically confined to the domain of specifically human activity--the artificial, man-made milieu. In addition to the adversary opposition of the unknown natural milieu which threatened mankind with extinction, Sorel conceived the hard-won artificial milieu as subject to regressive pressures which seemed to inhere in man as species, while man as individual faced the assured fatality of his personal life. In the context of these ideas, Sorel assumed that the labor of generations past provided an important heritage for the present. He was led by this valuation for tradition, to reject what he believed were contemporary tendencies toward selfish individualism and to adopt a position which asserted the ethical value of human work, a cooperative effort undertaken to preserve and enlarge the domain of human activity.

⁴⁹ Georges Sorel, "L'Humanité contre la douleur," p. 399. See also Chapter VIII, note 62.

The diabolical institution of slavery, Sorel wrote in 1889, was the central evil of Greek society, and he attacked Aristotle whom he believed had provided a philosophical justification for it by teaching: "Quand on est inférieur à ses semblables autant que le corps l'est à l'âme, la brute à l'homme, et c'est la condition de tous ceux chez qui l'emploi des forces corporelles est le seul et le meilleur parti à tirer de leur être, on est esclave par nature."⁵⁰ Slavery, Sorel asserted, would destroy any society which practiced it. Because of slavery the dominant citizen-class of Athens did not work and as a consequence relied upon force to maintain themselves. The lack of work led to an extreme demoralization of the Athenian citizenry, an occurrence which Sorel regarded as a necessary consequence of this avoidance of work: "Il en a été ainsi dans tous les siècles, et c'est là une loi de la nature humaine."⁵¹ For Sorel, Proudhon had properly understood the role of work in human life:

Not only is work necessary to the conservation of our bodies [Proudhon wrote] it is indispensable to the development of our minds. . . . As much as the law of consumption humiliates us, so much the law

⁵⁰ Georges Sorel, le procès de Socrate, p. 85.

⁵¹ Ibid. See also Chapter I, Part 2, note 40.

of work lifts us up. We do not live exclusively the life of the mind, but by work we spiritualize more and more our existence.⁵²

Writing in 1894, Sorel observed that it would be extremely useful for the study of humanity to accept the perspective of man as worker and not to separate him from the activities which were necessary for the preservation of life.⁵³ Thus Sorel insisted on extending Aristotle's conception of man as a rational and social animal by noting that the word "worker" comprehended " . . . les deux expressions d'être vivant et d'être raisonnable; nous disons donc que l'homme est un travailleur sociale."⁵⁴

In 1901, Sorel continued his examination of the role of work in human life in an essay entitled The Social Value of Art. The contemporary world, he believed, was under the influence of a universalizing force which he labeled "le travail." The role of modern man, he wrote, was to be one of incessant labor " . . . uniquement préoccupée d'agrandir incessamment le champ de la puissance humaine."⁵⁵ The ancient dualism of mind and body on which Sorel believed the ancient economy had reposed had been

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Georges Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 96.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 253.

⁵⁵Georges Sorel, La valeur sociale de l'Art, p. 22. See also Chapter IV, note 18.

replaced by intense and absorbing action. Sorel characterized this action as " . . . le commencement et la fin de toute notre vie."⁵⁶ All that which remained in the domain of pure speculation and did not translate itself into any practical work, Sorel viewed as a " . . . sorte d'amputation intellectuelle de l'homme."⁵⁷ Work, which the ancients had regarded as servile, could through an association with aesthetics, Sorel forecast, allow the worker to " . . . cesse alors de considérer la loi du travail comme une loi d'esclavage et de dégradation."⁵⁸ Manual labor, Sorel wrote in 1919, which was employed for the means of the common life " . . . a le droit d'être rangé dans la même classe que les sculptures."⁵⁹ The great opportunity for the present generation, Sorel concluded, would be to "Faire que le travail manuel constitue, grâce à cette marche de la production vers l'art, le moyen par excellence que l'humanité emploiera désormais pour surmonter la douleur."⁶⁰

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 24. See also Chapter IV, note 23.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 25. See also Chapter IV, note 24.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 31. See also Chapter IV, note 30.

⁵⁹ Georges Sorel, "L'humanité contre la douleur," p. 419. See also Chapter VIII, note 90.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 420. See also Chapter VIII, note 94.

The work of humanity, which for Sorel comprised the artificial milieu, was for him necessarily collective. It employed the labors of past generations and, in the present, had become an ever more intense and cooperative undertaking under the influence of increasingly industrialized life. The joint-effort of the human species, perpetually threatened by an enveloping, unknown cosmos and subject to its own internal uncertainties, caused Sorel to look with suspicion upon concepts which emphasized individualism. The classical economists, Sorel observed, in 1894, believed that society was an historically formed collection in which nothing social in itself existed.⁶¹ Supported by such philosophers as John Stuart Mill, these economists denied the existence of social characteristics by asserting that "les hommes dans l'état de société sont toujours des hommes, leurs actions et leurs passions obéissent aux lois de la nature humaine."⁶² This allowed the classical economists to conceive of work as an individual act, but in real life, Sorel asserted, men can rarely execute their projects alone and thus the resulting literary, religious, scientific associations were, for him, of great interest. To John Stuart Mill's assertion that man does not change when he is in society

⁶¹ Georges Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 246.

⁶² Ibid., p. 244. See Chapter I, Part 3, note 34.

Sorel replied: " . . . où donc l'homme est-il autrement qu'en société? Si on le considère à l'état individuel, c'est par une abstraction scientifique."⁶³

The Middle Ages had conceived man as an isolated entity, Sorel continued, but this individualism which was so rooted in the European mind, must, he asserted, be replaced by a concept which " . . . reconnaître comme base de tous nos raisonnements un caractère social dans les actes humains."⁶⁴ All the formations of the human mind, Sorel concluded, had their own histories which occurred in the social context of the artificial milieu.

The concept of an isolated, individual intelligence reasoning on itself which Sorel charged had been advanced by René Descartes was, he asserted in 1896 in his Study of Vico, "un véritable leurre."⁶⁵ This appeal to individual sentiment, Sorel charged, was a pretention to reconstruct by a single individual that which the preceding generations had elaborated in an enormous collective human undertaking. Science as a human activity, Sorel believed, was social and not individual; it had a history behind it and could only be well understood by

⁶³Ibid., p. 251. See Chapter I, Part 3, note 38.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 256. See Chapter I, Part 3, note 41.

⁶⁵Georges Sorel, Etude sur Vico, p. 811.

consulting this history which " . . . intéresse la vie de l'homme comme espèce et le développement de l'humanité."⁶⁶

Having accepted a concept of humanity as a social species whose joint-labor had produced an artificial milieu which served as the basis upon which human life could be preserved and extended, Sorel emphasized the central importance of tradition as a freely accumulated life-sustaining heritage whose value must not be underestimated. As early as 1889 he wrote in The Trial of Socrates that Aristotle's proclamation in behalf of an absolute right of individual genius must be rejected in favor of a conception which Sorel attributed to Taine:

The community past, present and future is held in common. Each generation is only the temporary guardian and the responsible depository of a precious and glorious patrimony which it has received from the preceding and is charged to transmit to the following. . . . There is no such thing as an a priori universal and absolute individual right.⁶⁷

Society, Sorel insisted, was not made up of absolutely free individuals each seeking his own private well being:

. . . la société est un être vivant, dont la personnalité est aussi certaine que celle de l'être individuel. L'être social est à la fois producteur et consommateur: chacun des membres apporte son contingent de travail et entre en échange avec tous les autres.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 812.

⁶⁷Georges Sorel, Le procès de Socrate, p. 197.

⁶⁸Georges Sorel, "Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon," p. 628.

This interchange for Sorel was transtemporal: "Where has our present civilization," he asked, "drawn that which is best in our minds? Has not contact with Hellenic genius given our thinking an entirely distinctive shape?"⁶⁹ Although Sorel's acceptance of that which the past had created was not absolute, and he rejected the development of a dogmatic rationalism on the grounds of its anti-historical bias, he staunchly affirmed the vital role of past epochs in the elaboration of the artificial milieu, whose existence he insisted was the fundamental condition of human freedom: "Nous sommes libres en ce sens que nous pouvons constriure des appareils qui n'ont aucun modèle dans le milieu cosmique; nous ne changeons rien aux lois de la nature, mais nous sommes maîtres de créer des séquences ayant une ordonnance qui nous est propre."⁷⁰

When Georges Sorel completed his study of Vico in 1896, his conception of the social and historical nature of human development was reaffirmed. Vico, rejecting Descartes, was interested in the development of man as species--humanity was for him social and not individual. To these observations, Sorel added his own on the subject of the importance of the study of the past:

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁰Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 264. See Chapter I, Part .3, note 47.

" . . . il n'est donc pas conforme à la raison de négliger l'autorité de la tradition: celle-ci doit être étudiée et discutée."⁷¹ The new science of Vico was thus for Sorel a history of human ideas which depicted an evolution proper to what Sorel called "la métaphysique de l'esprit humain."⁷² This historical development, Sorel wrote, " . . . reste toujours sociale comme aujourd'hui l'humanité est son oeuvre à elle-même."⁷³

Moral elements, such as the demand for individual justice did not derive from human nature. They were derived from certain historical conditions, and Sorel accepted the thesis of Renan that " . . . la réclamation obstinée pour la justice individuelle" originated in the people of Israel.⁷⁴ "We live on the resources accumulated by our fathers," Sorel wrote in 1898, and following Renan he affirmed that Rome and Greece had founded the state, law, philosophy and science.⁷⁵

In a speech delivered in 1907, Sorel defended the importance of tradition against the utopian socialists

⁷¹ Georges Sorel, "Etude sur Vico," p. 813. See Chapter II, note 64.

⁷² Ibid., p. 814.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Georges Sorel, "L'Ethique du Socialisme," p. 291. See also Chapter III, note 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 292. See also Chapter III, note 38.

of the nineteenth century who he believed, signaling the work of Fourier, had called for a complete break with the past.⁷⁶ He quoted Proudhon in rebuttal of what he believed was Fourier's disregard for the value of tradition and history: "Quoi! cet immense travail de l'humanité serait non avvenu, l'histoire n'aurait aucun sens et tout ce mouvement n'aurait été qu'une longue déception!"⁷⁷ In March, 1909, Sorel quoted from an essay by Ribot a statement which affirmed the lasting influence of man's historical experience: "Depuis que l'homme a une histoire . . . aucun des besoins et désirs qu'il a manifestés dès l'origine n'a disparu . . ." ⁷⁸ To comprehend the nature of man became for Sorel synonymous with an understanding of his history.

By 1911, Sorel was associated with the founding of a periodical whose statement of purpose affirmed the necessity of preserving the heritage of the past although this affirmation was qualified with the admission that all periods of history had their errors.⁷⁹ Certain aspects

⁷⁶ Georges Sorel, La décomposition du Marxisme, p. 15. See also Chapter VI, note 10.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 16. See also Chapter VI, note 10.

⁷⁸ Georges Sorel, "La religion d'aujourd'hui," p. 240. See also Chapter VI, note 45.

⁷⁹ Georges Sorel, "Statement," p. I. See also Chapter VII, note 12.

of the heritage of the past, the statement continued, were vital for the present and their preservation was praiseworthy. Tradition, the statement asserted, ". . . loin d'être une entrave, est le point d'appui nécessaire qui assure les élans les plus hardis."⁸⁰ The problems of distinguishing between those elements of the past which merited preservation and study and those which did not was confronted by Sorel in 1917 in his study entitled The Utility of Pragmatism. For the pragmatist, Sorel affirmed ". . . la tradition est un élément de premier ordre dans la connaissance."⁸¹ However, Sorel cautioned, tradition has a productive force only ". . . où . . . existent ces libres concurrences de vonlontés éclairées."⁸² To those who used tradition in political and religious polemics and to whom ". . . la tradition n'est pas nourrie de liberté, mais enregistre les décisions de autorité," Sorel responded that ". . . le pragmatisme n'a donc rien à débattre avec l'idée réactionnaire de la tradition . . . pour parler comme il convient du pragmatisme, il ne faut jamais séparer la liberté et la

⁸⁰Ibid., p. I. See also Chapter VII, note 14.

⁸¹Georges Sorel, "De l'utilité du Pragmatisme," p. 185. See also Chapter VIII, note 25.

⁸²Ibid. See also Chapter VIII, note 26.

raison."⁸³ The tradition to which Sorel recognized the right of participation in the formation of the contemporary world was, he wrote, that which was " . . . le fruit des efforts libres et raisonnés de nos pères."⁸⁴ On this heritage, he concluded, " . . . travaillent notre liberté et notre raison en vue d'améliorer nos conditions actuelles de vie et de transmettre, si faire se peut, quelque chose d'utile à nos successeurs."⁸⁵ Human intelligence, Sorel concluded in reference to Henri Bergson, because it was collective and progressive, required multitudes of research and collaboration. Pragmatism had the value of indicating that " . . . l'humanité construit des doctrines dont la valeur est constatée par l'utilité qu'on leur reconnaît au cours d'une longue expérience."⁸⁶ These constructions of humanity, whose survival value had been demonstrated by history, were precisely those elements which collectively and cumulatively comprised the specifically human formulation which Sorel designated as the artificial milieu.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 185-86. See also Chapter VIII, note 27.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 186. See also Chapter VIII, note 28.

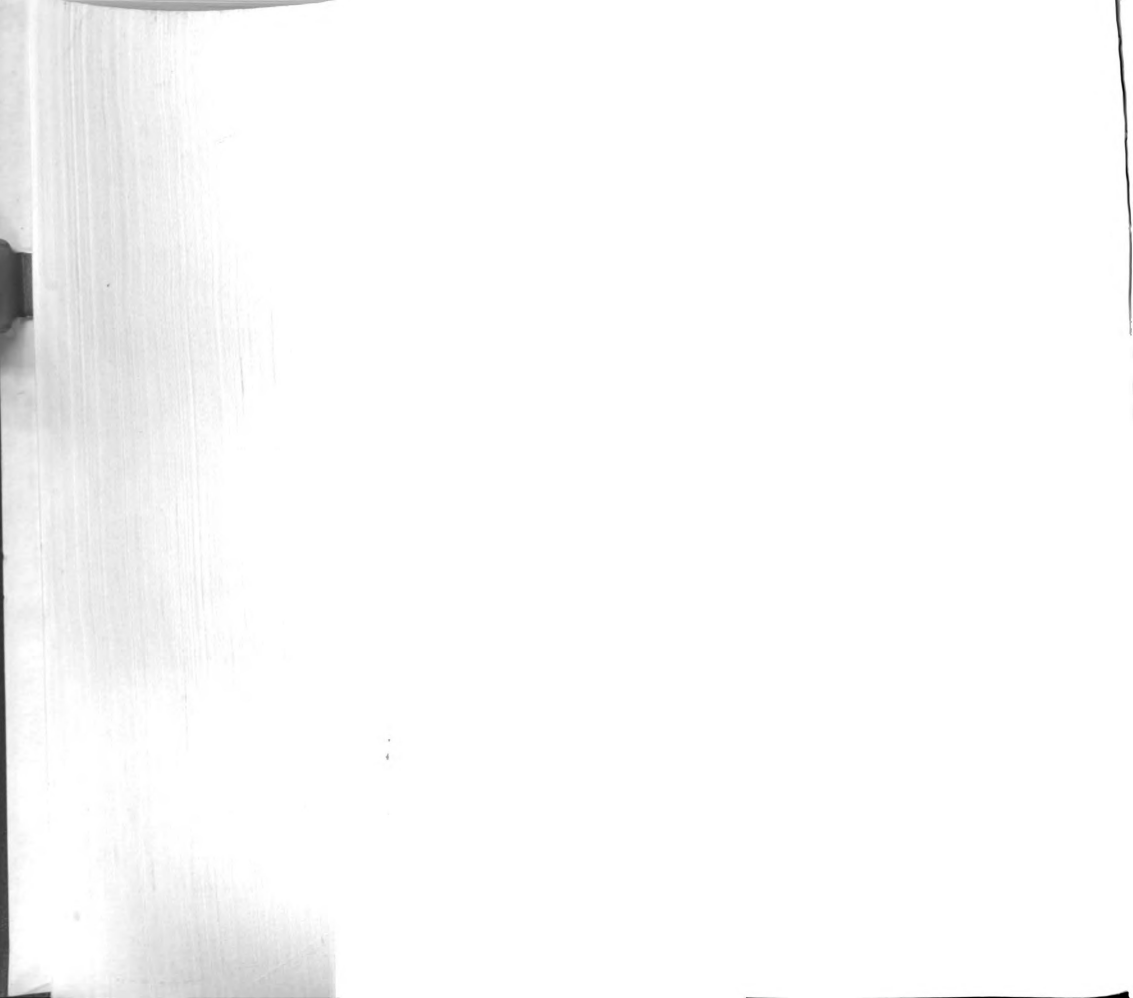
⁸⁵ Ibid. See also Chapter VIII, note 29.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 462. See also Chapter VIII, note 54.



It was in the context of the artificial milieu, whose epistemological limits have already been examined, that Sorel evaluated the human disciplines of science, sociology, and history. His pronouncements were typically anti-dogmatic; absolute and universal truth, he believed to be false concepts. In 1895, in the course of a book review, Sorel noted his agreement with the conclusion that it was the duty of the man of science to expose himself to error and to abandon the false vanity of the savants who held to more absolutist concepts.⁸⁷ An understanding of the history of science, Sorel believed, would defy a purely logical approach. Pure logic, Sorel charged, had been historically preferred to observation and experience because it was a psychologically less fatiguing process. Science, like all human activities had a history; and it was only by consulting this history that science could be comprehended. In 1897, Sorel reviewed a book by M. J. Payot entitled De la croyance in which he found a definition of science with strong affinities to his own. Science was, according to Payot, a collection of methods designed to classify phenomena and to suitably represent that phenomena; science " . . . laisse la réalité hors de ses prises, tout son effort est dirigé vers l'utile et

⁸⁷ Georges Sorel, "Les lois psychologique du Symbolisme," p. 275.



non vers le vrai."⁸⁸ Science was, Sorel concluded, ". . . un appauvrissement et un symbolisme."⁸⁹ Although it could not penetrate the cosmic, Sorel added, science, as an expression of the reasoned activity of man, could become, in the artificial milieu, a tool for self-awareness. Sorel speculated further that the hegelian conception of the close relationship between art and science seemed especially fecond.

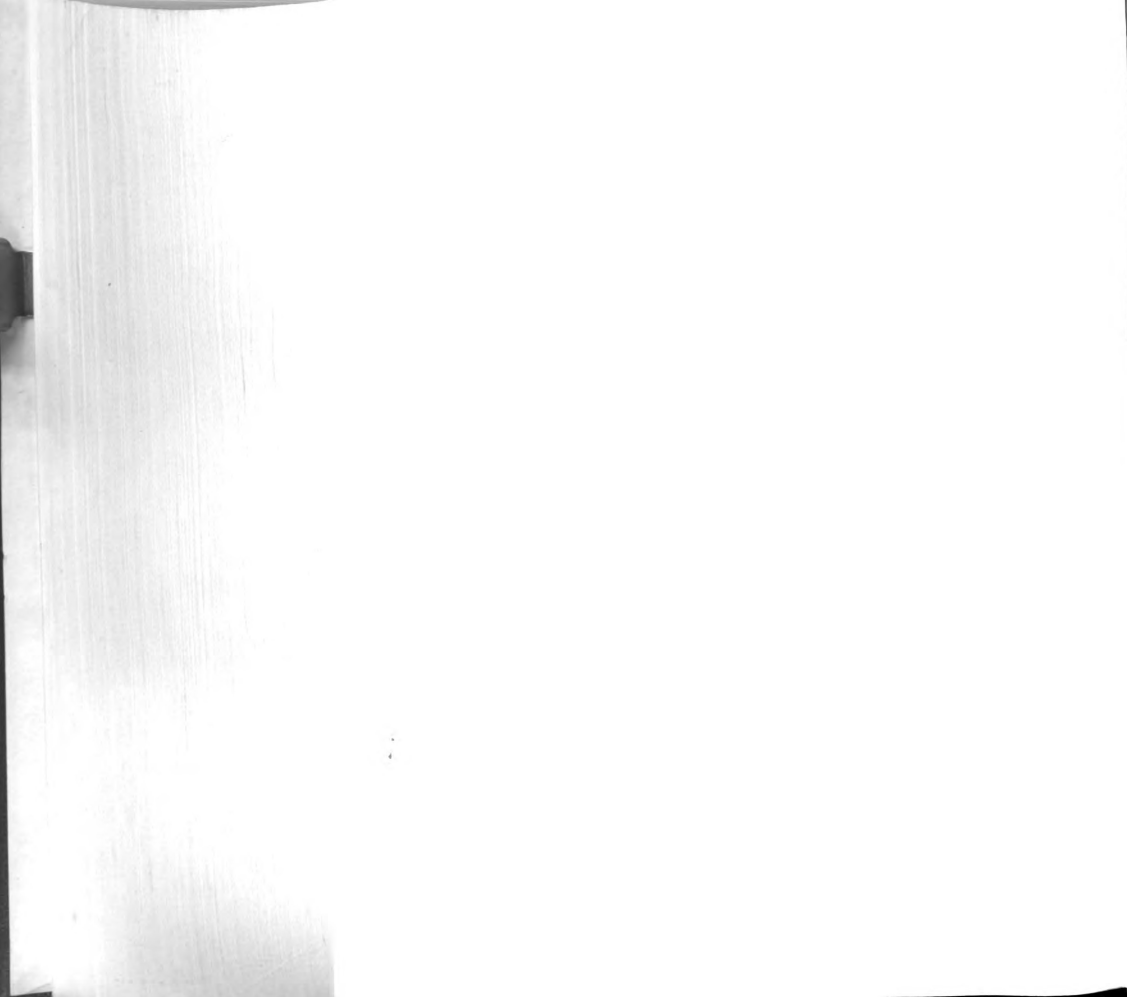
Sorel concluded in 1905 that each branch of human knowledge must formulate its own approach to understanding and he emphasized that the tools developed in one branch were not necessarily applicable to the others. Mathematics as utilized by the contemporary physicist was merely a system of images chosen for the aesthetic reasons of simplicity and convenience which as a construction within the artificial milieu had taken the place of an unknowable natural milieu.⁹⁰ Every hypothesis, he wrote in 1905, ". . . est l'introduction d'un mécanisme étranger à la nature."⁹¹ Science was thus

⁸⁸De la croyance, reviewed by Georges Sorel, p. 181. See Chapter II, note 94.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Georges Sorel, "Les préoccupations," p. 880. See also Chapter IV, note 86.

⁹¹Ibid. See also Chapter IV, note 87.

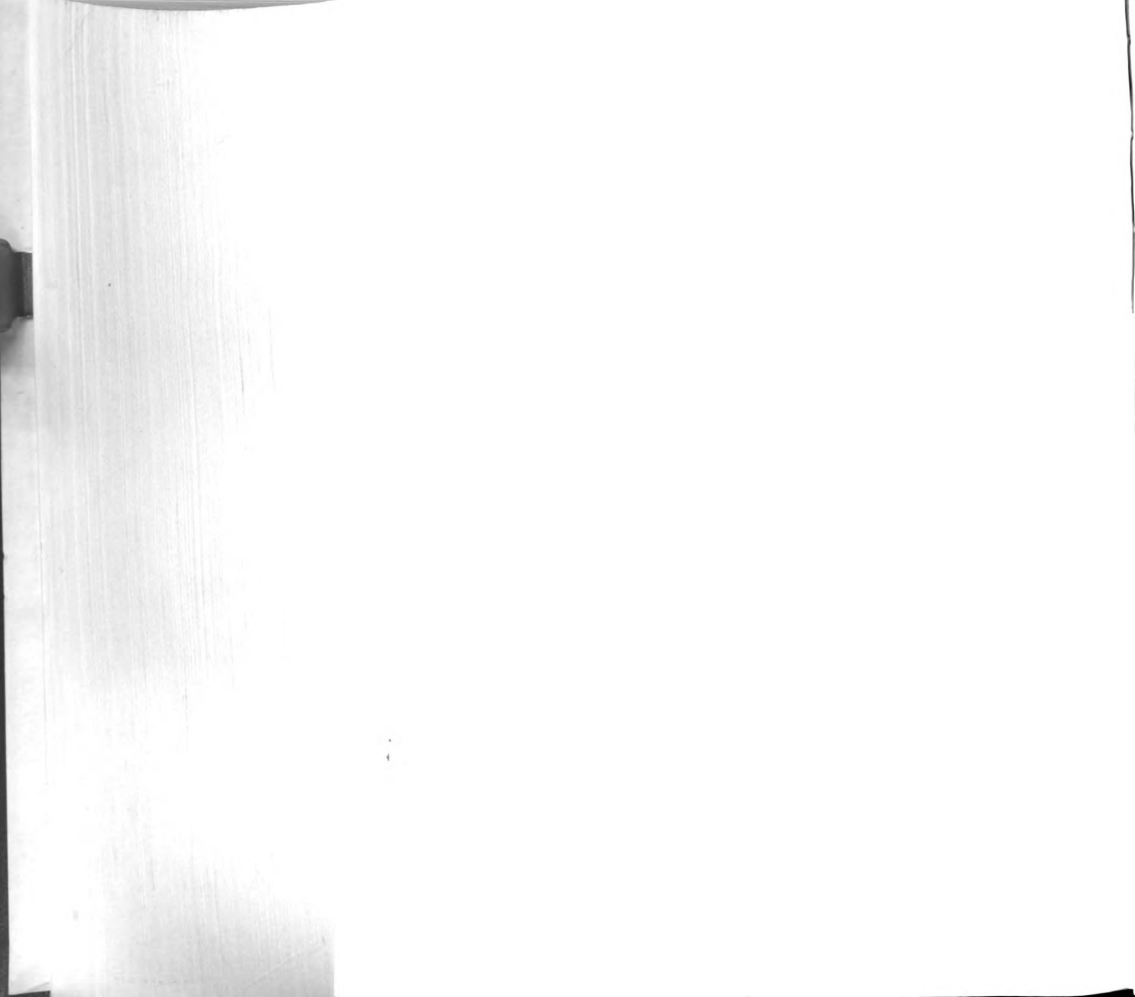


as infinite as the inventive genius of human beings. Sorel thus rejected the concept of laws which governed the cosmos, suggesting that faith in the stability of these assumed laws could be traced to purely social origins. In 1908, Sorel emphasized the great service to human understanding as well as to the various branches of science which was rendered by the poetic imagination, and he strongly criticized the contemporary pedagogues who he charged had stifled this capacity for invention in their students.⁹²

Science, Sorel wrote in 1910, must appreciate that its investigations are confined to the limits of an artificial milieu by the human origins of its observations. Science did not derive certainty from logic, but from the experimental mechanism it had at its disposal and he agreed with LeBon who had indicated the precarious nature of this certainty: "Toute leur instrumentation scientifique sert seulement à donner à certaines illusions, dont les fidèles eux-mêmes n'étaient pas toujours très sûrs, une apparence de certitude, qu'elles n'aurait en jamais acquise autrement."⁹³ The champions of experimental science, Sorel charged in 1911, who

⁹² Georges Sorel, "L'Evolution créatrice" (Jan. 1908), p. 52. See also Chapter V, note 124.

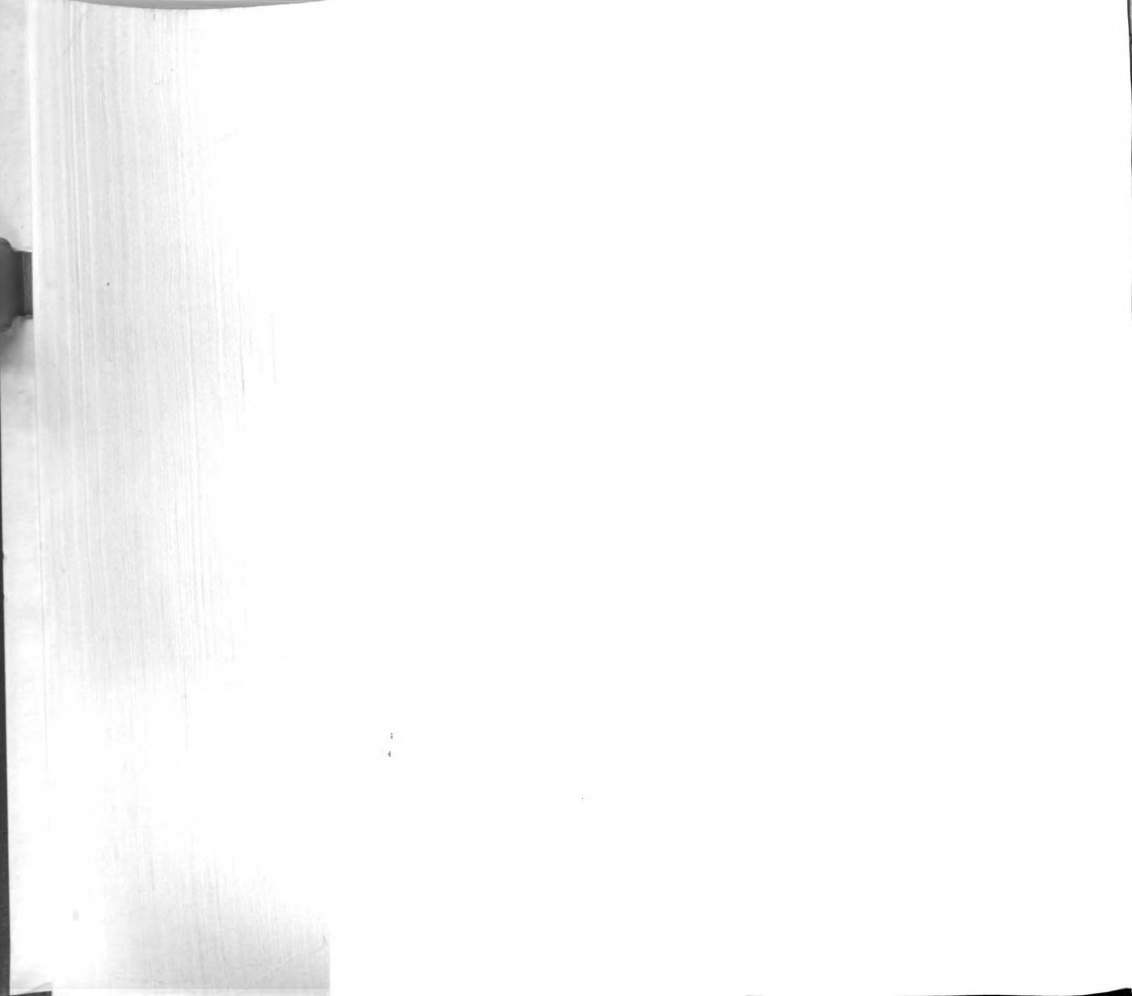
⁹³ Georges Sorel, "Sur la magie moderne," p. 7. See also Chapter VII, note 30.



failed to accord sufficient attention to experience posed a great danger for the progress of human understanding.⁹⁴ The alternative which Sorel proposed under the influence of the writings of Cournot (Matérialisme, vitalisme, rationalisme) was to reject absolutism and to consider the realities of nature and history. Ultimately, Sorel concluded, the veracity of a scientific explanation must be determined pragmatically, and he observed that the historical study of the sciences would reveal a realm of relativity and flux.

Georges Sorel was especially disturbed by the use to which mathematics was directed by sociologists of his time. He saw in these applications an attempt to extend the tools of physics to the study of human relationships and he rejected the attempt of such sociologists as Emile Durkheim to thereby produce a more "scientific" study of human society. Each branch of human knowledge, Sorel believed, must develop the tools proper to its unique concerns; and the application of mathematics to the study of human relations awakened his concern. In 1895, he complained that Durkheim had reduced the concept of morality to an empirical notion of frequency: ". . . il a fondé sa morale . . . sur l'appréciation du degré de

⁹⁴Georges Sorel, "A la mémoire de Cournot," p. 7. See also Chapter VII, note 39.



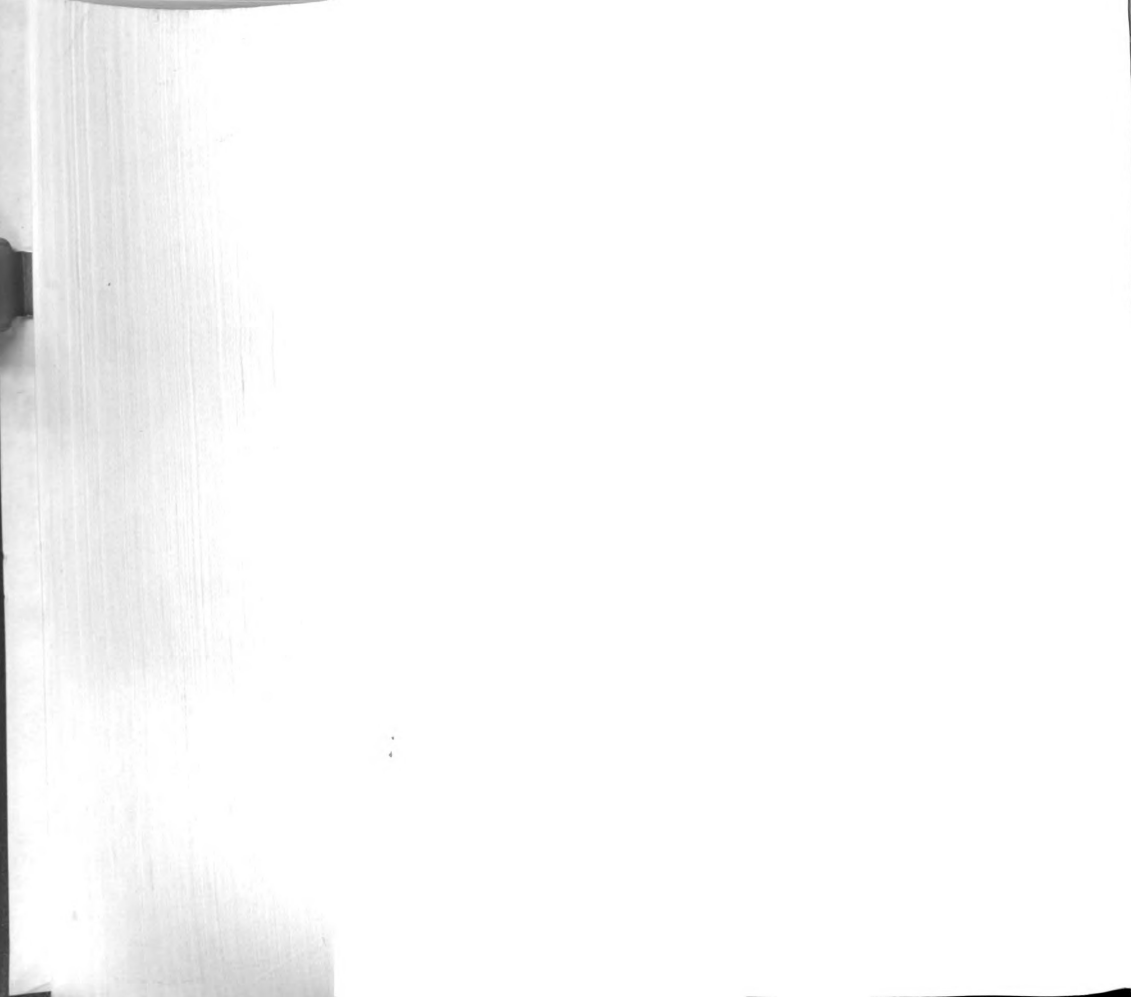
généralité."⁹⁵ This quantitative analysis was objectionable to Sorel because he believed it falsely assumed homogeneity: "En sociologie il n'y a aucune raison pour supposer que des phénomènes éloignés les uns des autres dans le temps et l'espace soient homogènes."⁹⁶ The authors of such research, Sorel charged, construed their observations according to their personal opinions. Statistics had a role to play in sociology, Sorel affirmed, but it was wrong to borrow a nomenclature from physics and make it the basis of what he labeled "une sociologie algébrique." The result of this approach Sorel wrote in 1900 was to employ the images of mathematics in a realm of psychology " . . . sous prétexte de rigueur scientifique, remplacent ce qui est d'une observation difficile où même impossible, qui prétendent expliquer ce qui se voit par ce qui ne se voit pas."⁹⁷

In May, 1903, in a letter to Croce, Sorel observed that " . . . la sociologie, en voulant traiter 'physiquement' la science sociale, n'aboutit à rien; il faut se résoudre à considérer les notions avec leur

⁹⁵ Georges Sorel, "Les théories de M. Durkheim," p. 4. See Chapter II, note 8.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 13. See Chapter II, note 10.

⁹⁷ G. Belot et M. Bernes, Questions de Morale, p. 18. See also Chapter III, note 23.



mobilité et leur variété."⁹⁸ In the same year Sorel published his Introduction à l'économie moderne in which he complained that many sociologists retained a total faith in the sovereign power of science and who " . . . s'imaginent la possibilité de déduire des propositions scientifique des programmes pratique."⁹⁹ For Sorel this position was entirely incorrect. It was necessary, he asserted, that sociology adopt at the outset of its projects a frankly subjective aspect; that it clearly understand " . . . ce qu'elle veut faire et qu'elle subordonne ainsi toutes ses recherches au genre de solution qu'elle veut préconiser."¹⁰⁰ Because Sorel believed that all classifications and all relationships established among phenomena depended upon the pursuit of a practical goal, he advised that it would be prudent to place this goal in evidence. The conceptual approach of geometry as developed by the ancient Greeks was appropriate to the study of unchanging entities but not for the study of sociological facts. He therefore recommended the rejection of all systems of sociological analysis which were not the product of reflection on

⁹⁸Letter to Croce 21 mai 1903.

⁹⁹Georges Sorel, Introduction à l'économie moderne, p. 386. See also Chapter IV, note 43.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. See also Chapter IV, note 44.

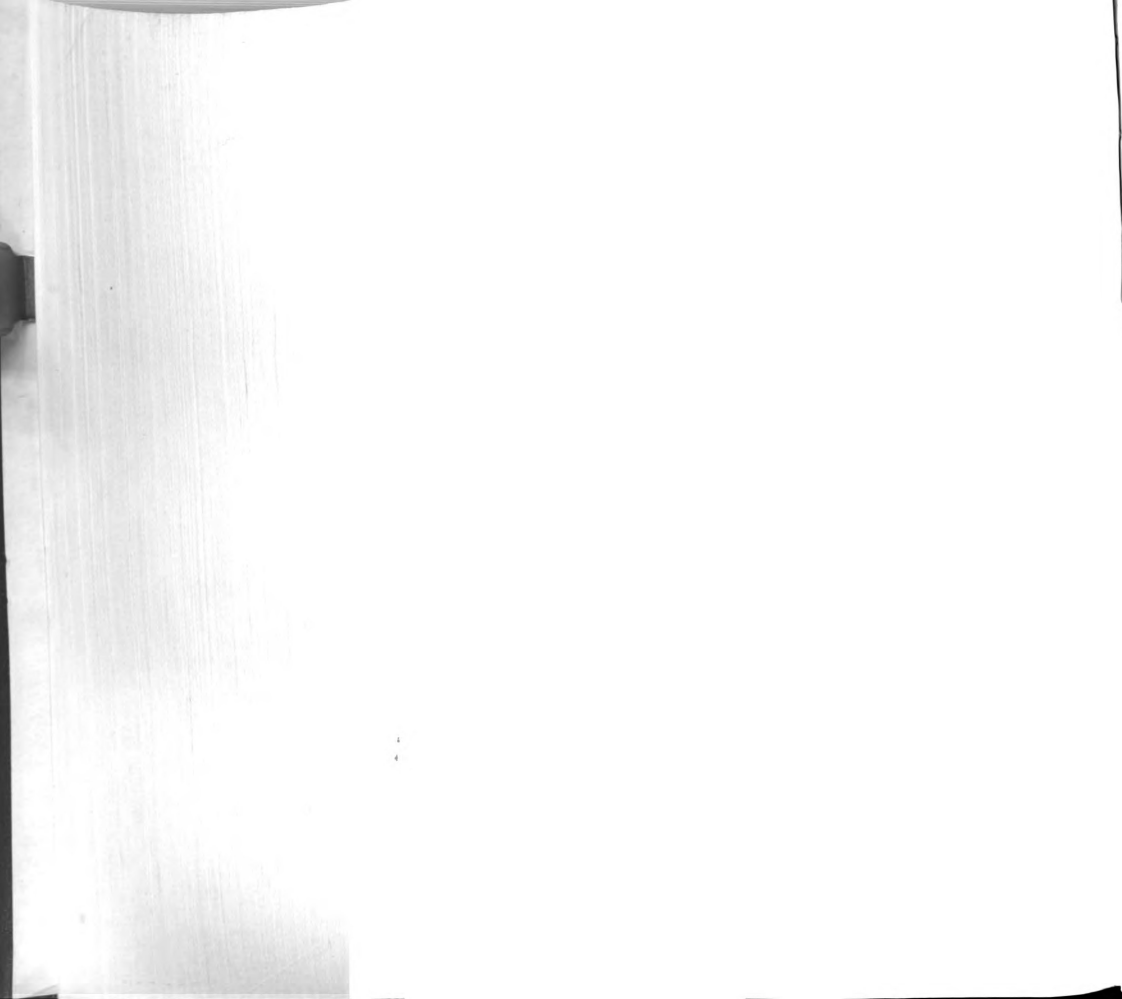


institutions, usages and empirical rules having acquired their final forms through practice. This suggested to Sorel an essentially historical perspective, ". . . c'est ce qui se présente le dernier dans le monde, qui explique l'antérieur."¹⁰¹ In a review of Joseph Lottin's Quételet, statisticien et sociologue Sorel reaffirmed his dissatisfaction with what he considered the abstract approach of Durkheim: ". . . aujourd'hui on a peine à comprendre comment Durkheim peut appeler pathologique ce qui s'éloigne de la moyenne."¹⁰²

No less than science and sociology, the field of history was visualized by Sorel as a realm of human knowledge which posed its own unique requirements. The purely logical approach seemed unsuitable for the historical study of the evolution of human institutions. Sorel, in his study of Vico in 1896, additionally rejected the cyclical concept of an ideal history composed of an eternal succession of political forms. However, because, as Vico had taught, history was man-made it presented for Sorel a unique opportunity for human understanding, but the undertaking required an appreciation of its great complexity: ". . . Le mouvement historique ne consiste pas dans un développement homogène; on ne peut même pas

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 391. See also Chapter IV, note 51.

¹⁰²Quételet, statisticien et sociologue, reviewed by Georges Sorel, p. 146.



dire que les causes produisent des effets immédiate."¹⁰³

In place of the uniform cyclical evolution envisioned by Vico, Sorel wrote:

. . . nous avons un enchevêtrement d'évolutions, qui ne sont susceptibles d'aucune définition générale, parce qu'à un instant donné on les trouve à tous les moments de leur développement. Mais les conditions économiques, les rapports sociaux, tous les complexes historiques agissent sur ces évolutions pour favoriser certains développements.¹⁰⁴

Disagreeing with Jean Jaurès who had written in an essay entitled "Idéalisme de l'histoire" that ". . . everyone agreed that the historical movement had a determined direction," Sorel responded that ". . . doubtless this assumption could render history intelligible but it was a falsification."¹⁰⁵

Writing in 1905, following his study of the historical work of Renan, Sorel elaborated his objections to the psychological approach to historical analysis which reduced history to the actions of a few great men. Instead, Sorel wrote, it would be more useful to ". . . regarde les hommes plutôt comme des porteurs de symbols que comme des créateurs."¹⁰⁶ To deemphasize the role of

¹⁰³ Georges Sorel, "Etude sur Vico," pp. 930-31. See Chapter II, note 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 911.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. See Chapter II, note 82.

¹⁰⁶ Georges Sorel, Le système historique de Renan, p. 5. See also Chapter IV, note 61.



single individuals and to recognize the role of chance in human events, Sorel believed, would not weaken the prestige of historical studies. If there was an order to be found in the past, Sorel continued, it was an order which, similar to a calculation of probabilities, could not be explained but which could only be observed:

. . . c'est la combinaison d'une infinité de hasards dans le désordre le plus absolu des causes qui produit l'ordre apparent. Mais tous les hasards ne se combinent pas de la même manière; c'est ce que savent toutes les personnes qui se sont occupées du calcul des probabilités.¹⁰⁷

Thus he concluded " . . . c'est toujours du hasard qui engendre l'histoire."¹⁰⁸

The historian, according to Sorel, must constantly battle against the prejudice of total causality and he insisted that historical studies could never be exhausted. He advised the historian to be guided by present needs when studying the past; the historian, he wrote, should confine himself to " . . . ce que l'on juge digne d'intéresser et d'instruire le monde moderne."¹⁰⁹

Agreeing with Renan, Sorel emphasized the aesthetic element in historical studies and was surprised to notice the extent to which professional historians had failed to

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 16. See also Chapter IV, note 69.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 20. See also Chapter IV, note 73.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 21. See also Chapter IV, note 75.



comprehend this: "Ils ne paraissent point savoir que toutes les règles de la critique n'ont de sens que sous la réserve que leur application est subordonnée à un considération esthétique."¹¹⁰ Writing to Croce in December, 1905, Sorel observed:

Les idées que j'ai exposée dans l'Introduction (le système historique de Renan) . . . ne plaisent pas aux savants: il leur paraît scandaleux de regarder le jugement esthétique comme la loi cachée de toute la critique historique. . . . L'histoire n'est utile et sérieuse qu'à la condition de bien reconnaître son caractère d'art constructif subordonné à des fins extrascientifiques et dans lequel les faits sont la partie la plus inutile.¹¹¹

In 1909 in an essay entitled la Révolution Dreyfusienne, Sorel continued his attack on those historians who wished to explain cataclysmic historical events by resorting to the claimed genius of certain great men. Again accepting the opinion of Renan, he asserted that if these protagonists were studied closely, the shadow which concealed their mediocrity would vanish " . . . pour montrer que leur prétendu génie est une illusion engendrée par la gravité des troubles au milieu desquels ils ont vécu."¹¹² The men of the French Revolution,

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 27. See also Chapter IV, note 78.

¹¹¹Letter to Croce December 1905.

¹¹²Georges Sorel, La Révolution dreyfusienne, p. 6. See also Chapter VI, note 33.

Sorel agreed " . . . ne furent pas grands! ils furent les ouvriers d'une grande heure."¹¹³

Interpretations of historical developments, Sorel wrote in 1914, always contained a great deal of subjectivity and he concluded that it was better to admit this subjective element than to follow "le rationalisme commun" which believed that a "scientific" account of the general movement of history could be rendered by speculations on morphological evolutions alone.¹¹⁴ It was by a careful study of the past that the inadequacies of these claimed scientific schools could be discredited, Sorel concluded. It was paradoxically the historians themselves, he insisted in 1917, who could provide the most effective critique of the dogmatism of rationalism, logic, natural right and permanent philosophy by demonstrating that humanity had historically constructed doctrines whose value could be measured pragmatically by considering their utility in terms of duration.¹¹⁵

Thus the realms of human knowledge represented by science, sociology and history were placed by Sorel in the context of the humanly fabricated artificial milieu,

¹¹³Ibid., p. 4. See also Chapter VI, note 32.

¹¹⁴Georges Sorel, Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat, p. 13. See also Chapter VIII, note 6.

¹¹⁵Georges Sorel, "De l'utilité du Pragmatisme," p. 462. See also Chapter VIII, note 54.

which would admit of no dogmatism and no universally valid principles. All the discoveries of human intelligence, he believed, were necessarily limited by the subjective origins of human observation. To deny this condition by asserting universally valid principles, Sorel rejected as dangerous to the continued life of the human species; it suggested to him an optimism sustained by pride in the face of a more realistic pessimism which epistemologically envisioned man as severely limited to a world of his own fabrication which was enveloped by an unknowable cosmic milieu. Sorel's reflections on the limitations of language and his lengthy analysis of the impact of what he called myths on human behavior reinforced his contention that human activity could not be reduced to a purely logical analysis.

Language, Sorel observed in 1894, awakened man to the dual nature--social and individual--of human existence.¹¹⁶ His study of Vico revealed the ability of words to acquire authority and to excite even the most sublime sentiments. He noted how the Greek philosophers had incorporated many known fragments from ancient poetry for the purpose of " . . . transportaient à leurs oeuvres une partie des sentiments que ces fragments avaient

¹¹⁶Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 252.

évoqués."¹¹⁷ From this he concluded that no philosophical system could become influential solely on the basis of the logical value of its arguments: "Sans doute la foi cherche à se justifier devant la raison; mais les raisons qui les justifient n'auraient aucune valeur s'il n'existait pas des états affectifs profonds donnant de la consistance à un commencement de croyance."¹¹⁸

Writing in 1906, Sorel noted the great role which the " . . . idolâtrie des mots joue . . . dans l'histoire de toutes les ideologies" and he emphasized that ordinary language " . . . ne saurait suffire pour . . . projette sur les chose une pleine lumière."¹¹⁹ He concluded that to be effective an ideology must seek to employ means of expression which could " . . . faire appel à des ensembles d'images capable d'evoquer en bloc et par la seule intuition, avant toute analyse réfléchie, la masse des sentiments."¹²⁰ Sorel, who believed that it was an error to consider clarity of expression to be synonymous with truth, asserted that in certain instances words like art could flourish best in mystery, half-shades, and

¹¹⁷ Georges Sorel, "Etude sur Vico," p. 940.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. See also Chapter II, note 87.

¹¹⁹ Georges Sorel, "la grève générale," p. 260. See also Chapter V, notes 28, 29.

¹²⁰ Ibid. See also Chapter V, note 30.

indeterminate outlines. Pointing to the example of Rousseau, Sorel observed in 1907 that the lyrical form of his writings was the result of "la raison d'art." Rousseau, Sorel wrote, ". . . cherchait à dire ce qui lui paraissait le mieux convenir à son talent."¹²¹ Rousseau, whom Sorel regarded as the most powerful orator in the French language since Bossuet, often replaced reason with eloquence: ". . . ce n'est pas la science qui détermine la thèse à développer, mais l'art."¹²²

In 1907, Sorel delivered a speech on Marxism in which he emphasized his conviction that the cult of dogmatic adherence to a specifically literal interpretation of words ". . . important peu à celui qui veut aller au fond des choses."¹²³ And to those writers who had criticized Marx for having spoken in "un langage plein d'images" which they did not consider suitable for scientific investigation, Sorel expressed a diametrically opposed view: "Ce sont les parties symboliques, regardées jadis comme ayant une valeur douteuse, qui représentent,

¹²¹ Georges Sorel, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," p. 518. See also Chapter V, note 104.

¹²² Ibid. See also Chapter V, note 105.

¹²³ Georges Sorel, "la décomposition du Marxisme," p. 59. See also Chapter VI, note 27.

au contraire, la valeur de l'oeuvre."¹²⁴ Henri Bergson had taught, Sorel concluded, " . . . que le mouvement s'exprime surtout au moyen d'images que les formules mythique sont celles dans lesquelles s'enveloppe la pensée fondamentale d'un philosophe, et que la métaphysique ne saurait se servir du langage qui convient à la science."¹²⁵ Sorel found in Nietzsche, whom he regarded as one of the most eminent thinkers the European world had produced, a thinker especially gifted from a literary point of view, whose "puissance étonnante de pénétration" was beyond the understanding of his " . . . contemporains qui ont perdu l'usage du langage métaphysique."¹²⁶

Regular discourse and argumentation, Sorel observed in 1911, was almost powerless to liberate minds which had come under the influence of conceptions which appeared to be sound superficially but which were in fact unfounded. This intellectual slavery could only be destroyed, Sorel insisted, by employing a procedure capable of producing a powerful experience in which " . . . la réalité se manifesterait en opposition absolue avec les abstractions que les masses acceptent comme vérités incontestables."¹²⁷

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 60. See also Chapter VI, note 28.

¹²⁵Ibid. See also Chapter VI, note 29.

¹²⁶Sorel, "Vues sur les problèmes de philosophie," p. 65. See also Chapter VI, note 66.

¹²⁷Sorel, "Trois problèmes," p. 270.

Sorel believed that Thomas More's Utopia was such a work, and he praised it for having affirmed the triumph of the aesthetic intuition over what he called "les mécanismes scolastiques."

Closely related to Sorel's observations on linguistics were his persistent speculations on the propensity of the human mind to be motivated to action by undemonstrable constructions which he termed myths. The characteristics of these constructions together with their individual and social impact were of recurring interest to Sorel throughout his writing career. Writing in the Trial of Socrates in 1889, he took note of a phenomenon which marked the origins of his fascination with the human propensity to believe the incredible: "D'après une loi de notre nature, nous voulons quelque chose d'indémontrable à croire. Le 'credo quia absurdum' appartient à toutes les époques et à toutes civilisations."¹²⁸ He found evidence of the power of such myths in the old Greek polytheism, which in its decline, he believed could not be reinvigorated by a scientific explanation of its myths because " . . . they drew their force from the freedom with which they had been formed in the national poetry; to reconcile them was impossible; to explain them

¹²⁸ Sorel, le procès de Socrate, p. 142. See also Chapter I, Part 2, note 58.

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by allegory or by history would destroy them."¹²⁹ By 1894, writing in an essay entitled "L'Ancienne et la nouvelle métaphysique" he affirmed the unpredictable and complex motives of human action which he suspected was importantly effected by emotional states. Human actions, he wrote " . . . sont déterminés par l'appétit qui se dirige vers un bien présent ou vers un bien considéré comme un futur désirable; l'appétit est subordonné lui-même à nos états affectifs au moment de l'action."¹³⁰

On the basis of these observations, Sorel rejected the "abstract science" of the sociologists whom he charged had formulated utopian ideas in the social realm. Condemning these practices, he wrote in 1896 that this state of mind led to " . . . la purgation complète des systèmes sociaux; l'élimination de tout ce qui est obscur, imparfait, inintelligible . . . "¹³¹ An excessive reliance on the rational and the logical had caused the utopians to undervalue what Sorel called "une loi générale de notre imagination créatrice," which he defined as a pre-rational cognitive process which was

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 278.

¹³⁰ Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx, p. 256. See also Chapter I, Part 3, note 41.

¹³¹ Sorel, "la science dans l'éducation," p. 219.

impelled by powerful emotional forces.¹³² The development of rational cognition, which Sorel attributed to Greek philosophy, had introduced a new cognitive process but, Sorel insisted, ". . . la logique de l'imagination" remained capable of dominating the human mind. An intense emotional excitation he believed could overwhelm the rational facilities--a phenomenon which he thought played a vital role in the lives of children, crowds, and action-oriented mass movements. To ignore this dimension of the human experience would result, Sorel believed, in an overly abstract and false analysis of human actions, as he believed had occurred among the utopian sociologists of the past and the positivists of his day.

In 1903, Sorel questioned if it would be possible to furnish an intelligible exposition of human action without employing the concept of myths.¹³³ He complained that the philosophers of history had not succeeded in producing a very clear idea of the considerable role ". . . que les mythes ont joué dans la pensée humaine."¹³⁴ Sorel affirmed his conception that an understanding of

¹³²Sorel, "Etude sur Vico," pp. 1022-23.

¹³³Sorel, Introduction à l'économie moderne, p. 394. See also Chapter IV, note 52.

¹³⁴Ibid. See also Chapter IV, note 53.

myths was necessary to expose in an exact manner the conclusions of his own social philosophy which did not claim to operate according to the rules of scientific logic. Although the future was for Sorel necessarily unknowable, man continued to produce speculative constructions as if he could project himself into the future--and these imaginings, Sorel insisted, could have great efficacy. Such constructions, Sorel regarded as myths which he defined as ". . . des compositions faites avec art, en vue de donner un aspect de réalité à des espoirs sur lesquels s'appuie la conduite présente."¹³⁵ Among the historical examples which demonstrated the efficacy of myths, Sorel emphasized the expectation of the early Christians of the return of Christ and the ensuing ruin of the pagan world. Although this catastrophic event, expected at the end of the first century, did not occur, the "mythe apocalyptique" Sorel insisted was a great value to the early Christian movement. From this he concluded "Il faut juger les mythes comme des moyens d'agir sur le présent et toute discussion sur la manière de les appliquer matériellement sur le cours de l'histoire est dépourvu de sens."¹³⁶ In the writings of Rousseau, Sorel discovered a similar use of strongly

¹³⁵Sorel, "la grève générale," p. 263. See also Chapter V, note 31.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 265. See also Chapter V, note 32.

colored images utilized for the purpose of stimulating among his contemporaries an emotion capable of engendering " . . . des reflexions utiles mais indéterminées, au sujet de leur manière de vivre."¹³⁷ The proper understanding of the images of Rousseau, Sorel concluded, required " . . . qu'il faut prendre en bloc, comme des masses indivisibles et non considérer comme des modèles proposés à l'empirisme qui en tirera ce qu'il pourra."¹³⁸

It was an error to believe, Sorel wrote in 1911, that a more complete development of rationalism would diminish the credulity of modern man which on the contrary he believed was as great as it had been in the ancient world. Knowledge of the existence of this propensity to believe should enhance, he speculated, the capacity for the development of mentally more satisfying constructions which would recognize the human need for ideas which had " . . . des racines puissantes dans le coeur."¹³⁹ In 1912, while reviewing la crédibilité et l'apologétique by P. A. Gardeil, Sorel concluded: "L'expérience établit que les hommes arrivent à des convictions très fermes,

¹³⁷Sorel, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," p. 531. See also Chapter V, note 110.

¹³⁸Ibid. See also Chapter V, note 111.

¹³⁹Sorel, "Sur la magie moderne," p. 4. See also Chapter VII, note 29.

capables de commander souverainement toute leur conduite par un travail dans lequel l'intelligence discursive joue un rôle assez atténué."¹⁴⁰

The political dimension of Georges Sorel's thought, including his view of Marxism and Syndicalism, is strongly colored by his general epistemological assumptions as well as his appraisal of language and his conception of the role of myth in human affairs. Antecedent to the influence of Marx, however, in the speculations of Georges Sorel, are his ideas concerning the state and the historical origins of its domination by men of superior talent--the intellectuals. Aristotle, according to Sorel writing in 1889, had proclaimed an almost unlimited political right to men of genius by insisting that such men should not be submitted to ostracism, nor should they be punished or submitted to the common level: ". . . it remains therefore, Aristotle wrote, to obey this man and to recognize in him a perpetual power."¹⁴¹ When this claim was extended to the talented, Sorel charged, a new oligarchic principle was posed which served to divide the ancient Greek city into two categories of citizens with the result that those who participated in an elevated intelligence enjoyed a position of special

¹⁴⁰ la crédibilité et l'apologétique, reviewed by Sorel, p. 157.

¹⁴¹ Sorel, le procès de Socrate, p. 197.

privilege. Socrates himself, according to Sorel, had posed a question which assumed the special claim advanced in behalf of the wise: "Could a government founded on the domination of the ignorant over the wise call itself legitimate?"¹⁴² Sorel rejected this claim, and concluded that the worst of all forms of government was that in which the rich and the talented shared power. The history of the Roman Empire had shown, Sorel observed agreeing with Renan, that by proclaiming political mastery for those talented enough to become rich and powerful, inequality was introduced into the law.¹⁴³ The bias in favor of the aristocracy of talent also marked Roman education, Sorel continued, subordinating everything to rhetoric, the goal of Roman education was directed to the formation of "argumentateurs."¹⁴⁴ This system of education, which Sorel believed was transmitted to the present by the Christian church because of its desire to produce men of talent capable of producing subtle arguments to counter theological errors, led to the development of a monstrous egotism. The quality of mind which made the aristocracy of talent so dangerous and objectionable, Sorel affirmed, was that it never doubted the legitimacy of its acts.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁴⁴Sorel, la ruine du monde antique, p. 70.

Writing in 1898, Sorel observed that the distinction between intellectual and manual labor appeared to him to be entirely arbitrary, and he rejected the qualitative distinction which he believed was the basis of the intellectual's claim of the right to possess the power of the state in late nineteenth century France.¹⁴⁵ The true vocation of the intellectuals, he concluded, was the exploitation of politics based on "la hiérarchie des capacités" the result of which in France had been an elite professional leadership which had become corrupt, exploitative and opportunistic. It was not only the qualitatively false valuation of intellectual over manual labor which had produced this result, according to Sorel. The history of the nineteenth century had shown that all attempts to constitute an administration of state power independent of the special interests of factions or parties had failed--the state could not become, Sorel concluded, an administrator of things.¹⁴⁶ The state had been historically an instrument in the hands of minorities for the profit of minorities and he added: "Cette loi

¹⁴⁵Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste," p. 15. See also Chapter III, note 10.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 10, 11, 12. See also Chapter III, note 9.

empirique s'explique facilement quand on se rappelle ce qu'a été la possession de l'Etat dans l'histoire moderne."¹⁴⁷

Sorel announced his conclusions with respect to political parties in 1907 when he observed that political parties were coalitions formed for the purpose of obtaining advantages which would lead to the control of the state. The impact of the introduction of political parties into a revolutionary movement he believed had the result that the mass, upon whom the movement depended, would accept the leadership of those whose interests were different from those of the mass. The party leadership hoped, Sorel wrote, ". . . que les masses leur liveront l'Etat, objet de leur convoitise."¹⁴⁸ Party objectives, Sorel believed, were always directed toward the conquest of state power which was to be utilized in behalf of the party and its allies. The state, Sorel concluded, was not an entity to be coveted; it must be abolished, and to this end he called for an anti-political revolutionary movement. Scorning the electoral process, Sorel in 1913, wrote in review of L'art de tromper, d'intimider et de corrompre l'électeur by Charles Marcault, ". . . les élections ne sont pas établies pour nommer des mandataires

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. See also Chapter III, note 7.

¹⁴⁸ Sorel, La décomposition du Marxisme, p. 25. See also Chapter VI, note 15.

du public, mais pour dire quelle faction jouira provisoirement des avantages que procure le pouvoir."¹⁴⁹

Georges Sorel first mentioned Karl Marx in a letter written to the director of the Revue philosophique in May, 1893. He complained in this letter that certain French sociologists, especially those who were " . . . les détenteurs des chairs officielles" such as Gabriel Tarde, had failed to appreciate the value of the thought of Karl Marx and had attempted to dismiss it without seriously considering its merit. By 1894, Sorel had completed a study of Marx and concluded that his thought was of central importance to an understanding of the contemporary world. Marx had conceived of man, according to Sorel, in the context of those activities which were fundamental to sustain life--man was a worker who in the attempt to preserve his life had constructed a human milieu. Writing in 1896, Sorel discussed what he identified as a central theme in the work of Karl Marx--"the liberation of mankind," Sorel wrote, " . . . comporte, comme première condition, une idéale identification de la matière et de l'esprit dans le milieu artificiel."¹⁵⁰ These were the circumstances in which, Sorel added, theory and practice became united. The importance of the study

¹⁴⁹See Chapter VII, Appendix B.

¹⁵⁰Sorel, "la science dans l'Education," p. 457.

of the productive organs of social human life, had also been emphasized by Marx who shared this idea with Vico. Marx had taught, Sorel continued, that this study, which must be confined to the world which was constructed by mankind in its successive labors, would " . . . met à nu le mode d'action de l'homme vis-a-vis de la nature, le procès de production de sa vie matérielle et, par suite, l'origine des rapports sociaux et des idées ou conceptions intellectuelles qui en découlent."¹⁵¹

Writing to Croce in 1897, Sorel indicated, however, that certain aspects of Marx's thought were unacceptable: " . . . les formules par lesquelles Marx a marqué sa position sont très obscures; mais ce qui me semble surtout obscur c'est la 'méthode dialectique': . . . je crois aussi que Marx n'a jamais cherché à préciser sa pensée sur ce point."¹⁵² He also complained to Croce in the same year that Engels had made a "dogmatique absolue" of historical materialism which had led certain Marxists to think of history as "une évolution fatale" and he warned that this tendency to regard such doubtful interpretations as "dogmes indiscutables" was dangerous to Marxism which " . . . entre les mains des disciples

¹⁵¹Sorel, "Etude sur Vico," p. 814. See Chapter II, note 65.

¹⁵²Letter to Croce 27 décembre 1897.

. . . est devenu une caricature."¹⁵³ By 1898, Sorel became increasingly preoccupied with the confusion which he observed between the theories of Karl Marx and the programs of the various groups which claimed to be Marxist. The dogmatic use of Marx, he concluded, was a misrepresentation: "Il ne faut pas, non plus, croire que tous les fruits du labeur de Marx puissent se résumer en quelques lambeaux de phrases ramassées dans ses oeuvres, réunies en formulaire dogmatique et commentées comme des textes évangéliques par des théologiens."¹⁵⁴ In place of this religious devotion to certain aspects of the writings of Marx, Sorel recommended an extension of his ideas and a rejection of Engel's fatalistic interpretation of historical materialism which had falsified Marx's concept of the interplay between economics and the other realms of human life. The mode of production of material life, Sorel insisted, dominated in general, but did not determine, the development of social political and intellectual life: ". . . l'organisation économique doit être considérée, à la fois comme effet et comme cause."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³Letter to Croce (2 juin 1897) (27 décembre 1897)

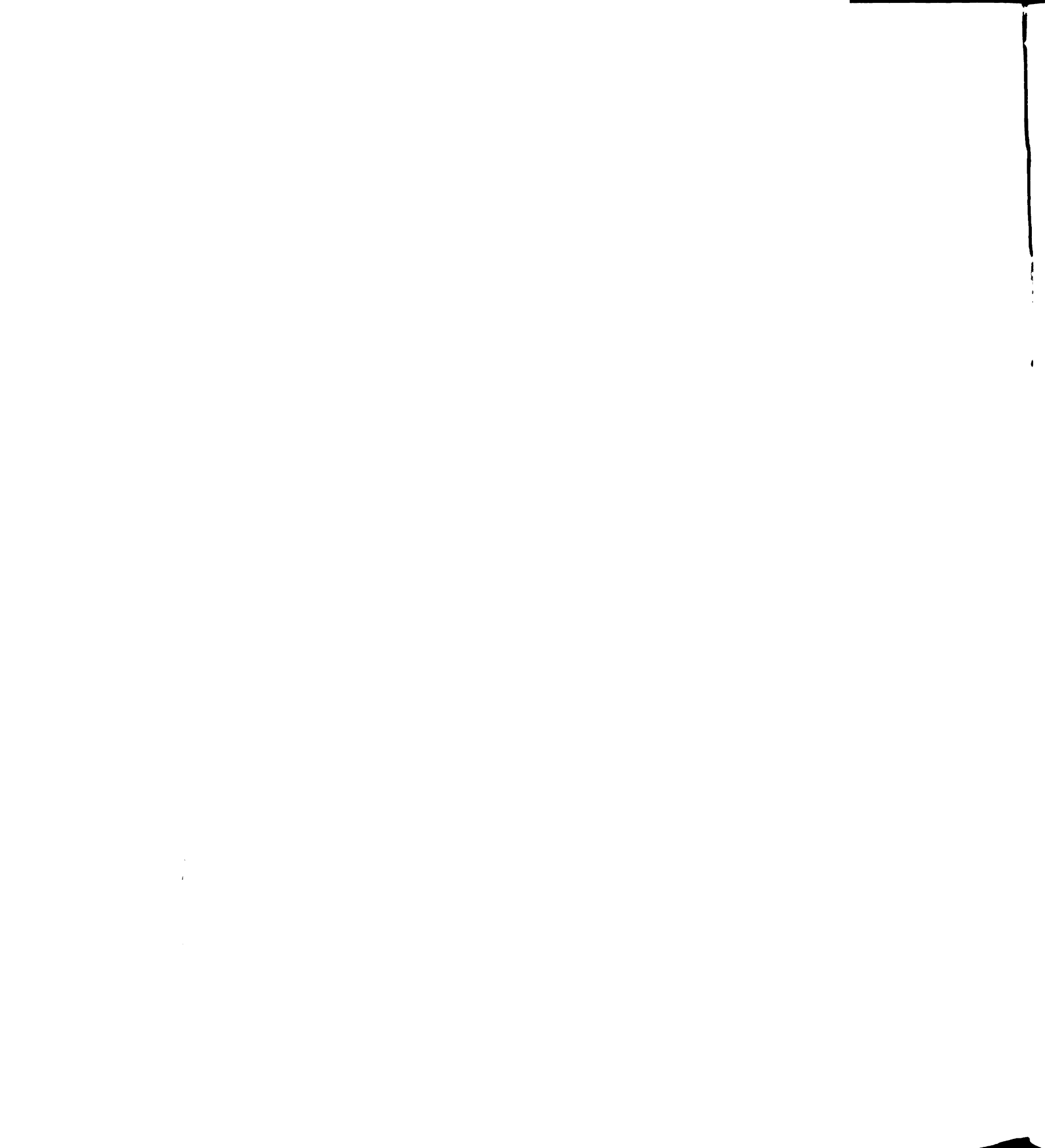
¹⁵⁴Sorel, "l'avenir socialiste," p. 5. See also Chapter III, note 2.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 7. See also Chapter III, note 4.

In 1899, Sorel published an essay entitled "L'Éthique du Socialisme" in which he complained that the followers of Marx in their battles against their adversaries had often ridiculed ethical preoccupations while placing all of their emphasis on the material side of the argument. These Marxists had ignored the moral basis of the mission of Marx by concentrating only on the victory of the proletariat and ignoring the ethical qualities of the conflict. Marx, on the contrary, Sorel insisted, had been strongly interested in class conflict which resulted in the introduction of new moral concepts and thus had praised the struggle for the 10-hour work day for women and children in England as " . . . pas seulement un succès pratique, que ce fut le triomphe d'un principe, qu'une nouvelle conception de l'économie avait été introduite dans la société."¹⁵⁶ For Sorel class conflict had an important bearing on judicial systems in that it represented a battle between two principles characterized by the idea that each class had of the role of law. The failure to recognize the moral dimension of class conflict caused Sorel to conclude: "Il y a une lacune grave dans l'éthique socialiste."¹⁵⁷ Writing to Croce in 1898, he observed,

¹⁵⁶ Sorel, "L'ethique du socialisme," p. 286. See also Chapter III, note 34.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 294. See also Chapter III, note 39.



" . . . les questions sur la morale ne peuvent plus être traitées avec le dédain des anciens marxistes."¹⁵⁸

The crisis of Marxist Socialism represented by the debate between Bernstein and Kautsky was for Sorel a confrontation between dogmatism and revision. Bernstein had, Sorel believed, invited socialists to disregard strict formula and revive Marxism by looking toward the future. Kautsky was, Sorel wrote, "le conservateur des vieux symboles, le défenseur des vieilles abstractions, . . . il ne faut pas se dissimuler que le triomphe de M. Kautsky voudrait dire la ruine définitive du marxisme."¹⁵⁹

In a letter to Croce in 1898 he observed: "Il faut que le socialisme marche dans le voie reconnue bonne par Bernstein, ou qu'il devienne une simple scolastique."¹⁶⁰

This hardening of Marxism into a scholastic dogma together with the development of permanent and influential parliamentary Socialist parties were both viewed by Sorel as serious threats to the revolutionary potential of Marxism. Instead of building a doctrinaire political party which Sorel believed would necessarily degenerate into a quest by the party elite for possession of the

¹⁵⁸Letter to Croce 1 avril 1898.

¹⁵⁹Georges Sorel, "Les polémiques," p. 45. See also Chapter III, note 54.

¹⁶⁰Letter to Croce 9 mai 1898.

power of the state, Sorel proposed that " . . . il faut procéder à un revision rigoureuse de la doctrine laissé par Marx et Engels."¹⁶¹

What remained essential in Marx, according to Sorel, was his conception of a social mechanism formed by classes whose conflict would transform society. This did not mean, Sorel insisted, that the battle of classes could explain all history and he attacked Engels for attempting to replace real history with a succession of forms engendered by causes independent of human action; and he concluded: " . . . il n'y a rien de déterminé dans l'histoire."¹⁶² The future, Sorel reaffirmed, was necessarily unknown " . . . nous ne connaissons pas le mécanisme sociale qui existera dans un certain nombre d'années et nous ne pouvons déjà que très difficilement raisonner sur le présent."¹⁶³ In the present, Sorel viewed the pursuit of purely material ends as a great danger to Marxist Socialism because he feared that to seek these ends exclusively would deliver the movement into the control of the political opportunists. Only by emphasizing the moral dimension of class conflict--and by

¹⁶¹Salverio Merlino, Formes et essence du Socialisme, preface by Sorel, p. III. See also Chapter III, note 55.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. X. See also Chapter III, note 61.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. XI. See also Chapter III, note 63.

making of the proletariat "le champion de tous les intérêts généraux contre les intérêts particuliers" . . . , Sorel concluded, could socialism initiate a new social organization. Marx had believed that trade unions were the first foundations of the proletarian edifice but he had failed to appreciate, Sorel asserted, their indispensable role of "la préparation juridique."¹⁶⁴ The trade unions, Sorel concluded, must not exist primarily to raise wage levels but should serve to develop sentiments of mutuality and solidarity which could become the functioning basis of the institutions of the future.

By 1906, Sorel believed that Socialism was threatened by an anti-Marxist transformation caused by the political participation of contemporary Socialist parties. This political development, Sorel believed, would make the fulfillment of Marx's call to " . . . rompre tout lien avec l'idéologie des temps actuel"¹⁶⁵ an impossibility. Against this tendency Sorel reiterated his conviction that for the proletariat to complete its revolutionary goal it must become insulated from "la pensée bourgeoise." It was thus vital, in Sorel's view, that the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat be maintained. Marx had taught, according to

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. XIX. See also Chapter III, note 66.

¹⁶⁵ Sorel, "Réflexions sur la violence," p. 43. See also Chapter V, note 7.

Sorel, that the preparation of the proletariat for its revolutionary mission " . . . dépend uniquement de l'organisation d'une résistance obstinée, croissante et passionnée contre l'ordre de choses existant."¹⁶⁶

For Sorel the Socialist movement was both a revolt and an organization. Thus while he admired the theoretical power of the insights which Karl Marx developed, he complained of Marx's inability to formulate a clear picture of how the proletariat could attain the degree of maturity requisite to its emancipating revolution. Writing in 1898, he speculated that the form of this needed organization must be federalist and he praised Durkheim for having pointed out the importance of such social entities while at the same time rejecting Durkheim's belief that such groups should remain " . . . soumises à l'action général de l'Etat."¹⁶⁷ Precisely to avoid coming under the domination of a state, Sorel believed, the proletariat must develop its own internal structure. The Syndical organization, which Sorel came to advocate as the mechanism of revolutionary preparation for the proletariat, must reject, he believed, outside guidance if the capacity for self-direction were to be

¹⁶⁶Sorel, "la grève générale," p. 277. See also Chapter V, note 36.

¹⁶⁷Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste," p. 10. See also Chapter III, note 8.

fulfilled: " . . . c'est dans le sein du prolétariat, c'est un moyen de ses ressources propres, que doit se créer le droit nouveau."¹⁶⁸ In the struggle between the Syndicate and the state which he envisioned, Sorel insisted on the need for solidarity and unity among the proletariat: the totality of workers, he wrote, " . . . forme un corps; les intérêts de tous sont solidaires."¹⁶⁹ The goals pursued by the Syndicats, he believed, must be general; their ends were not to be egoistic; they did not seek exclusive privilege. The socially divisive capitalistic categories of buyer and seller must be replaced by a new social concept of mutuality. The Syndicalist organization, Sorel believed, would complete Marx's theory of class conflict by providing the mechanism which would insure that "union of minds and hearts" which for Marx was the most fully developed characteristic of a class.¹⁷⁰ By producing its own moral sentiments based on mutuality, the Syndicalist proletariat could enhance the opposition between the existing law and its new morality, an opposition which Sorel believed was the driving force of the entire

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 18. See also Chapter III, note 133.

¹⁶⁹Ibid. See also Chapter III, note 11.

¹⁷⁰Sorel, "L'ethique du socialisme," p. 288. See also Chapter III, note 35.

Socialist movement. Change was forthcoming, Sorel wrote, when men reflect upon the disparity between their moral sentiments and the statements of judicial regulations: " . . . il arrive toujours des cas où les plaintes de l'individu opprimé nous semblent plus sacrées que les traditions, les nécessités de l'ordre et les principes sur lesquels repose la société."¹⁷¹ The object of Syndicalism, Sorel concluded, must not be a partial emancipation of the proletariat, it must remain opposed to the maintenance of all traditional claims to special title, it was a battle for the abolition of all government by class.

Georges Sorel's Syndicalist revision of Marxism was the outcome of his reflections on the historical development of human morality. To the natural rights tradition which he believed was attached to the liberal bourgeoisie and associated with the French Revolution, he opposed the concept of historical right which had been developed, he believed, under the influence of Karl Marx. "The Socialists are materialists, he observed in 1896, in the sense that they do not believe in the march of humanity toward, " . . . la Lumière divine, vers l'Esprit, ou toute autre expression de l'actualité de la Vérité et

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 291. See also Chapter III, note 36.

de la Justice."¹⁷² The general terms "justice" and "truth" were classifications based on convenience and not universal truths, Sorel concluded, they signified that which had been constructed by mankind in its successive labors. Thus for Sorel the development of moral concepts was a historical phenomena which belonged to the heritage of the human species. It was necessary to proceed, he believed, on the basis of the accumulated experience of the past, toward an enlargement of this moral heritage and he warned that it would be criminal to undertake a social revolution which " . . . aurait pour résultat de mettre en péril le peu de moralité existant."¹⁷³ Rejecting Durkheim's conclusion that preconceived methods for moralizing the people had been largely ineffective, Sorel sought to introduce a mechanism of moral preparation for the proletariat. For Sorel the question was not " . . . de savoir quelle est la meilleure morale, mais seulement de déterminer s'il existe un mécanisme capable de garantir le développement de la morale."¹⁷⁴ Syndicalism, he believed, could become the necessary mechanism, and to this extent it represented

¹⁷²Sorel, "L'idéalisme de M. Brunetière," p. 516.

¹⁷³Sorel, "L'avenir socialiste," p. 28. See also Chapter III, note 17.

¹⁷⁴Ibid. See also Chapter III, note 18.

the addition of an explicitly moral dimension to the Marxian conception of class conflict. Socialism, he insisted, ". . . se pose devant le monde bourgeois comme un adversaire irréconciliable, le menaçant d'une catastrophe morale; plus encore que d'une catastrophe matérielle."¹⁷⁵ Writing to Croce in 1899, Sorel noted the extent to which he had altered the system of Marx: "Je vous ai envoyé hier ma conférence sur l'Ethique du socialisme; j'ai un peu moralisé Marx et Engels, peut-être; je crois qu'ils n'ont jamais beaucoup réfléchi à ses questions; mais je crois avoir développé mes thèses dans un esprit marxiste."¹⁷⁶

Because of Sorel's conception of the state as a power center for which all political parties contested and which served as the bases for the exploitation of that power by corrupt minorities, he rejected the parliamentary Socialists as treacherous traitors. Class conflict, he believed, was necessary for the insulation of the proletariat during the period of its moral preparation. Parliamentary Socialists who offered the proletariat material amelioration represented for Sorel the greatest threat to the development of a new social order which he

¹⁷⁵Salverio Merlino, Formes et essence du socialisme, preface by Sorel, p. XLII. See also Chapter III, note 68.

¹⁷⁶Letter to Croce 27 mai 1899.

hoped would displace hierarchy and divisive individualism with mutuality and cooperation. He concluded that the opposition of the classes was indispensable to the workers movement. To this end, Sorel believed, Socialism must disavow the search for the means of leading the bourgeoisie to an enlightened sense of a superior law and concentrate instead on finding the means of defending the revolutionary role of the proletariat. Instead of confusing such concepts as class conflict by adhering at the same time to ideas of national solidarity and sacred patriotic duty, as Sorel charged the parliamentary Socialists had done, the Syndicalist, he believed, must find the means to clarify and emphasize the oppositions between the classes. Yet ordinary language, he believed, ". . . ne saurait suffire pour produire de tels résultats; il faut faire appel à des ensembles d'images capables d'évoquer 'en bloc et par la seule intuition,' avant toute analyse réfléchie, la masse des sentiments qui correspondent aux diverses manifestations de la guerre engagée par le socialisme contre la société moderne."¹⁷⁷ A social myth--the drama of the general strike, Sorel concluded, would serve this purpose perfectly because ". . . l'idée de grève générale est si bien adaptée à l'âme ouvrière qu'elle peut la dominer

¹⁷⁷Sorel, "la grève générale," p. 260. See also Chapter V, note 34.

de la manière la plus absolue et ne laisser aucune place aux désirs que peuvent satisfaire les parlements."¹⁷⁸

The ardent sentiment of revolt necessary to proletarian solidarity would be strengthened by the myth of a catastrophic general strike which could make of every conflict a symptom of a state of war and through it every strike would " . . . engendre la perspective d'une catastrophe totale."¹⁷⁹ Thanks to the myth of the general strike, Sorel believed, the necessary line of class cleavage would never be in danger of disappearing because at each instant the proletarian would imagine " . . . that he had been transported into a future such that present events could be considered as elements in a long development."¹⁸⁰

The struggle of the proletariat was, according to Sorel, actively resisted by a class which had the power of the state at its disposal. The operations of the police, proscriptions, and what he called "servile courts" were for Sorel examples of the use of force to maintain the status quo, and he deplored "la superstition du Dieu-Etat" which for both the bourgeoisie and the

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 268. See also Chapter V, note 33.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 275. See also Chapter V, note 37.

¹⁸⁰Sorel, "Réflexions sur la violence," p. 6. See also Chapter V, note 12.

parliamentary Socialists, he charged, had resulted in the justification of political prosecutions in the name of "la raison d'Etat." Sorel distinguished between these acts of proscription and proletarian violence which were, he believed, ". . . purement et simplement des actes de guerre" carried out without hate and without the spirit of vengeance.¹⁸¹ Acts of proletarian violence, he insisted, must be the expression of class conflict to have historical value, their goal was to defend the separation of the classes without which Socialism would be unable to fulfill its historical mission. Thus Sorel considered violence from the standpoint of its influence on social theory as an agent for the maintenance of ". . . la scission des classes qui est la base de tout le socialisme."¹⁸² He rejected unlimited violence as a danger to morality, and stressed that in violent confrontations "the defeated were not to be killed and non-combatants were not to be made to suffer."¹⁸³

The foregoing analysis represents my synthetic view of the intellectual career of Georges Sorel. Its

¹⁸¹Sorel, "les préjugés contre la violence," p. 161. See also Chapter V, note 25.

¹⁸²Sorel, "la moralité de la violence," p. 36. See also Chapter V, note 48.

¹⁸³Sorel, "les préjugés contre la violence," p. 161. See also Chapter V, note 25.

sole claim to validity resides upon the extent to which it can be verified by the documents which I have studied. There is another equally valid experience of Sorel's thought, one which perhaps he would have considered more important than the synthetic recapitulation which I have attempted. Sorel wanted to stimulate thought. He wished to stir the reader to personal speculation. I have attempted to retain this aspect of Sorel's work by presenting a sufficiently detailed documentary analysis to provide the needed context for an appreciation of his habits of mind.

I believe, however, that it is useful to proceed beyond an isolated experience of a Sorel idea which might provoke the birth of introspection which he characterized as the kindling of a mental fire, to a conception of the essentials of his thought as a whole, based on a methodology which could inspire the confidence that the ultimate synthesis is not unrelated to the documentary evidence. This formulation is prerequisite to an evaluation of the secondary literature on Sorel and must precede any attempt to criticize his thought if the criticism is to have the minimal validity of corresponding to the reality of his mind.

Part 2

Secondary Accounts

Irving Louis Horowitz, Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel (New York: The Humanities Press, 1961).

Irving Horowitz based his attempt "to gain entrance into Sorel . . . through an investigation of his cultural milieu. . . ." upon the doubtful assumption that "intellectual epochs have distinctive features by which they are known to all" (p. 5). The evidence which supports such a contention is not provided. The enormous task of constructing the cultural milieu (what Horowitz called "fin de siècle") is thus pursued simultaneously with the attempt to locate Sorel's ideas within this complex. The unfortunate results of this approach, which does not seek the milieu through the writings of Sorel, but seeks, almost by intuition, Sorel through the milieu--are numerous. Horowitz wrote: "Violence in all its forms was sanctioned. . . . For Sorel, the rules of war, which really came down to the absence of rules, were to govern the conduct and the aims of the general strike" (p. 32). This falsification of Sorel's doctrine is only the first of many. An example of the extent to which this milieu approach is deflected from a study of Sorel concerns the Horowitz treatment of the influence of Bergson on Sorel. He wrote: "Whether Sorel took only fragments from

Bergson, applying them in patchwork fashion to meet his own intellectual needs, or simply viewed Bergson's doctrine of the unconscious as a necessary pre-condition of a rounded political philosophy is a critical issue only if a causalist sequence of moving from idea to idea is considered a completely valid criterion" (p. 41). Whatever the meaning of such confused reasoning, Horowitz decided to let Jacques Maritain (la Philosophie Bergsonienne) speak for Sorel: "What Maritain says of Bergsonism is assuredly no less the case for Sorel" (p. 42). What Sorel himself had written was incredibly dismissed: "The comments of Sorel and Bergson upon one another are, after all, in the nature of afterthoughts" (p. 42). This methodology resulted in an utterly false conclusion about the relationship between Bergson and James in Sorel's thought: "De l'utilité du pragmatisme is a statement of staunch support for James at the expense of Bergson" (p. 43). When the question of Bergson and Sorel becomes unanswerable for Horowitz, there is always recourse to the cultural milieu. "Whether Sorel would have developed his political sociology in quite the same way independent of Bergson is an issue of little portent. It is enough to say that both were responding to a cultural milieu" (p. 43). But the milieu, which is to provide understanding of Sorel, takes on characteristics very opposed to his thought: "The quest for certainty

informed the spirit of the age" (p. 44). Despite the fact that Sorel's epistemology would refute any connection with such a quest for certainty cannot be known from an analysis which considers the milieu as a primary source.

I believe that this study exemplifies the potential dangers of a milieu approach which offers itself as a tool of analysis for the thought of Georges Sorel. This does not deny the potential value of such a general study, but the object of a work which attempts to encompass an epoch is, I believe, necessarily destructive of the concrete individuality of its component individual parts. I suggest that if such a milieu were to be constructed for the purpose of knowing Sorel it would be rigidly confined to the references which occur in Sorel's writings. Are not these the verifiable elements of Sorel's intellectual milieu? On the basis of what methodology could other ideas than those which he elaborated be included?

These questions about procedure are vital when a work such as this by Irving Horowitz sets out to produce a milieu analysis of Sorel while failing to comprehend the dominant role of major influences in Sorel's work. Perhaps this explains Horowitz's failure to present the epistemological significance of Sorel's own ideas on milieux: artificial and natural. The influence of Proudhon, Renan, Taine, and Poincaré are left to the side

in a study which seems preoccupied with larger evaluations. I cannot evaluate the milieu which Horowitz ultimately produced in so far as it concerns thinkers and intellectual historical movements other than those which directly and specifically occurred in the writings of Georges Sorel. I do believe, however, that the thought of Sorel is sacrificed by such an approach. Horowitz's citations alone show the extent to which Sorel's own work has been limitedly represented.

James H. Meisel, The Genesis of Georges Sorel (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The George Wahr Publishing Co., 1951).

Georges Sorel is "the man who introduced the term 'myth' into the language of political science" according to James Meisel (p. 15). But, Meisel added, if he himself has become the object of mythification, . . . that is partly his own fault. . . . Sorel did his worst to confuse the reader" (p. 16). In Meisel's ensuing list of those who influenced the development of Sorel's thought the name of Henri Poincaré is notably absent, as is any reference to Sorel's study entitled "The Preoccupations of Modern Physics." This oversight perhaps stems from the absence of any attention directed by Meisel to the epistemological basis upon which Sorel's thought appears to rest. Thus while having produced the most thoroughly documented analysis of Sorel's original writing currently available, Meisel remained confused about the

direction of Sorel's thought. "Is it necessary," he wrote, "to insist that a servant of so many masters is most likely to be the servant of none? There still remains, of course, the possibility that Georges Sorel, while able to digest his immense erudition, still did not succeed in giving his own work the unity on which we insist in an author even if we grant him the right to mercurial changes and protean restlessness" (p. 17). Meisel concluded: "In order to understand his thought one must search with him, grope with him" (p. 17). That the searching and groping yielded no concluding synthesis, Meisel attributed to Sorel's defects as a writer: ". . . the diffusion of interests and the difficulty of streamlining the evidence are not the only obstacles that make it so hard to penetrate through the crowd of Sorels to Sorel. The truth will out; he was not a good writer" (p. 17). A reading of Meisel against the background of a thorough familiarity with the documents which Sorel produced suggests, however, that the inconclusiveness of his lengthy study may be attributed to an unsound methodology. The "crowd of Sorels" which the body of Sorel's writings produce, can be seen from a perspective which allows a coherent and synthetic statement, as I believe my study has demonstrated. Meisel mixed these primary Sorels with visions of Sorel which emerged from distinctly secondary accounts without

suggesting to his reader (and perhaps to himself) the need to assign qualitatively different values to such very different sources. The second difficulty which I believe prevents this study from being as valuable as its prodigious research would seem to justify is the vitiating effect of Meisel's distracting and facile editorializing. Georges Sorel is not allowed to state his ideas with sufficient context to allow the reader to discover the movement of his provocative mind or the true direction of his ideas. For example Sorel's important study on Vico is misrepresented by Meisel as a dialectic between Vico and Marx: "His preoccupation with Marx . . . colors the whole essay and adds to it . . . a fourth dimension. Marx and Vico are pitted against one another, with Sorel reaping the benefit" (p. 67). A study of Sorel's essay on Vico does not support such an observation, and the observation itself distracts the reader from an evaluation of Sorel based on an examination of his writings, an examination which Meisel had promised would lead to "the actual Sorel . . . by discovering his totality in the very diffusion of his authentic outpourings" (p. 47). Had Meisel followed the dictates of his own methodology, and had he resisted the unqualified mixing of secondary sources and his own premature judgments perhaps the reader would have discovered the unifying threads which I believe are apparent in Sorel's unadulterated words.

The lack of any comprehension of direction in Sorel's thought unhappily effects Meisel's selections from Sorel's letters to Croce. I suggest that this difficulty could have been avoided had Meisel conducted a thorough study of Sorel's complete works prior to the attempt to select from the Croce letters those items for inclusion in his analysis. If this procedure, which has proven useful to my work, had been adopted, much of the irrelevant detail which now obfuscates those sections of Meisel's book devoted to the correspondence could have been better evaluated. Instead the letters are weakened by the apparent lack of criterion for selection which resulted in the inclusion of lengthy accounts of Sorel's technical problems with editors and translations, the state of his health and the unchecked urge on the part of Meisel to editorialize: "Like the German Thomas Mann . . . ," Meisel observed while introducing a letter from Sorel to Croce, "Sorel, the Frenchman from Germanic Normandy, fights against the type Setterbrini who wants to make the world safe for his supposedly superior Latin civilization" (p. 194).

Meisel, whose bibliographical work on Sorel was excellent, thus failed to present an account of "the genesis of Georges Sorel" in spite of his enormous research primarily, I believe, because he did not rigorously follow the empirical methodology which he

believed had served as the basis of his analysis. Had he been more faithful to this technique which he announced as "a chronological treatment of Sorel's works" (p. 47) he might have discovered in the complexity of Sorel's thought "the essential unity of purpose" which he believed "informed his writings" (p. 47).

Richard Humphrey, Georges Sorel Prophet Without Honor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

I believe that this study is the most complete and accurate account of the thought of Georges Sorel which I have read. Its weaknesses are the result of a desire on the part of Humphrey to place Sorel's ideas in a larger intellectual historical context which is skillfully drawn though over categorical. His understanding of many of Sorel's concepts, however, seems quite justified to me, and the depth of analysis is impressive. The most suspect chapter is entitled "Philosophy of Syndicalism" which fails to establish Sorel's position with respect to the state and the roots of his attitude toward intellectuals who exploit state power through political parties. The moral basis of the anti-political Syndicalist movement which Sorel believed could derive from the mechanism of Syndicalism is also overlooked. The intensely anti-individualist position of Sorel is also misrepresented by Humphrey who believed that Sorel wanted the proletariat "aroused to a passionate sense of

individualism by the revolutionary myth" (p. 209). In fact Sorel believed Syndicalism was a moral mechanism and would produce an anti-individualist ethic of mutuality and cooperation. The myth was needed for solidarity and was to serve as a faith in the catastrophe. Humphrey also ignored Sorel's persistent preoccupation with the historical nature of morality and the conflict between established legal systems and the moral dispositions which serve as the basis upon which legalisms come to seem inadequate: Sorel viewed this as a dynamic for change which caused him to visualize class conflict in highly moralistic terms. Humphrey does not discuss these ideas.

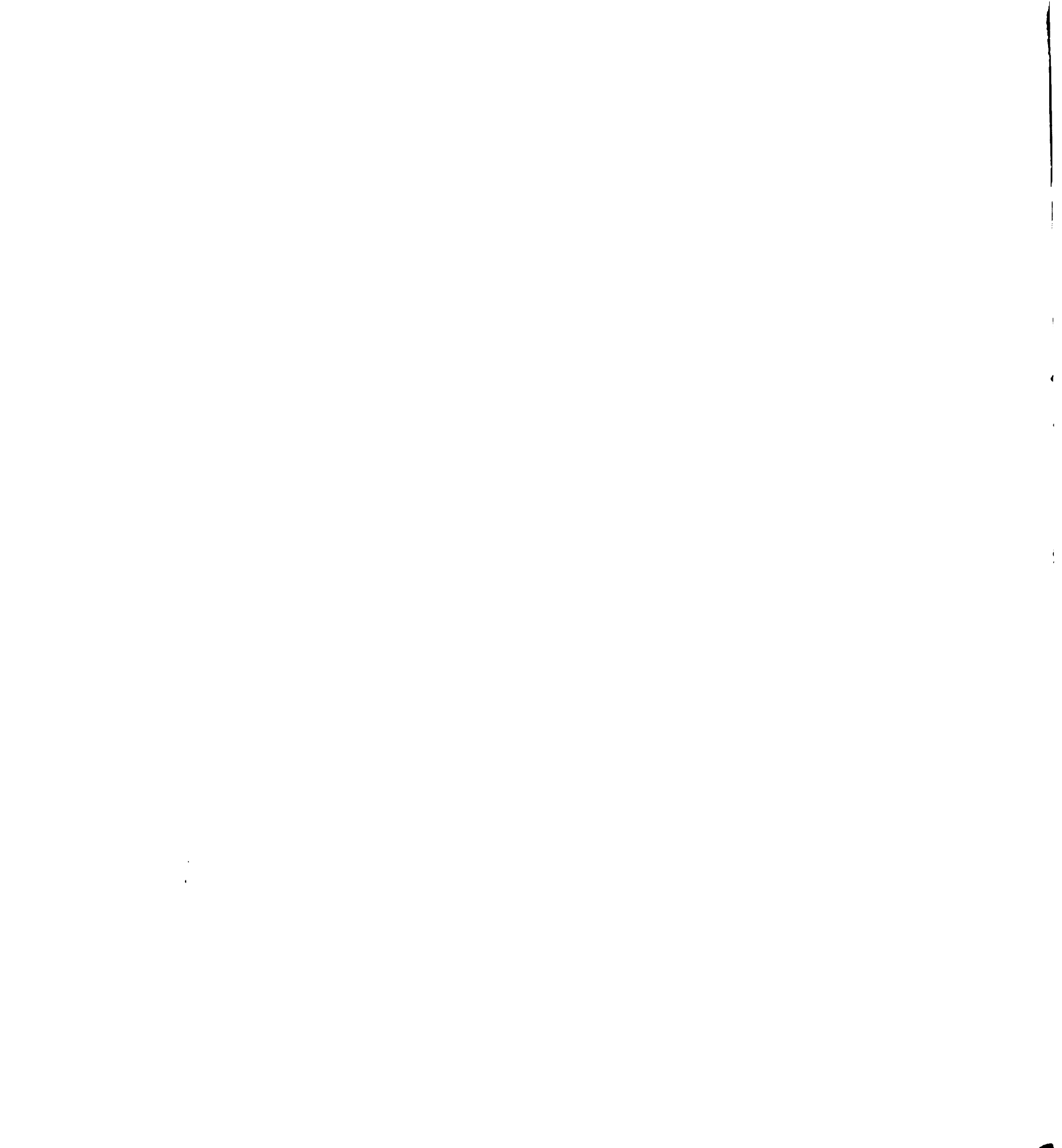
Nor does this work develop Sorel's linguistic observations which together with his epistemological position shed important light on an accurate understanding of myth. There are also no references to Sorel's observations on history and sociology as realms of human knowledge nor to the important role of pessimism which Sorel expresses so often.

Therefore, although the work is the most accurate exposition to date of certain of Sorel's ideas, it fails to suggest the depth and breadth of his interests. Documentation hardly intrudes on the rapid and thus artificial flow of ideas attributed to Sorel which, with the limitations I have noted, while faithful to the substance of parts of Sorel's thought does not offer the

reader any frame of reference from which to judge their accuracy and from which to experience the characteristic movement of Sorel's seemingly insatiable mind. In Humphrey's work, the reader must be content to listen. There is no opportunity to search and evaluate.

Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence, trans. by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth with an introduction by Edward A. Shils (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950).

It is unfortunate that the English translation of the collections of essays which formed Sorel's Reflections on Violence were introduced by an author so unschooled in Sorel's thought as Edward Shils. His observations on the structure of Sorel's thought and the assumptions upon which it was based are great obstacles to an evaluation of the essays for which this introduction was to have prepared the reader. Nothing could be more distant from Sorel than the following unsubstantiated assertions: "The (radical socialist) belief that there would come about a total and drastic transformation of society that would bring with it a total alleviation of life's ills . . ." (p. 14). "Their opposition has been derived from a feeling of being outside the existing society. They have felt little or no kinship with the rest of society. . . . This view is well embodied in the doctrine of 'art for art's sake.' . . . In Sorel, this political separatism reached its



highest point" (p. 16). This spate of analysis fails to comprehend Sorel's view of the artificial milieu outside of which man did not exist. It ignores his respect for tradition which was the origin of morality, and the concept of historical right. It ignores his view of the proletariat as champion of all sections and all classes. It fails to appreciate his view of mutuality. Separatism was part of the class dynamic for Sorel--it did not assert the assumption that ". . . moral duty entails in substance, hostility to those outside one's group" (p. 17). The overstatements continue: "Sorel's ethic . . . is the ethic of crisis which is resolved ultimately only by an apocalyptic transformation in which everything is totally changed" (p. 18). Had Shils been aware of Sorel's concept that change occurs in the open tension between judicial rules and emerging moral ideas and had he understood that separatism was viewed as necessary for that moral preparation, and that the apocalyptic myth merely sustained the conflict between two moral entities, he would perhaps not have so completely misunderstood the political thought of Sorel. The idea of total change is distant from all of Sorel's assumptions. The distortions continue: "His hatred of professional intellectuals, motivated by his hatred of whatever was rationalistic, instrumental and isolated from the tribal round of life, has sharpened our eyes to the moral cleavage between the

modern professional intellectual and primary institutions" (p. 21). Was Sorel's fear of the intellectuals really motivated by his hatred of whatever was rationalistic? What impression is such an assertion likely to create in the mind of a reader who has not been made aware of Sorel's epistemological assumptions? Is this an introduction to the thought of Sorel or an attack on a completely straw man?

In spite of Sorel's later writings, which were distinctly anti-authoritarian and undogmatic, Shils, ignoring the context of Sorel's writings attempted to discredit Sorel by association: ". . . he collaborated in a number of extremist authoritarian reviews, to which monarchists, nationalists, militarists and anti-democrats and anti-humanitarians of all sorts contributed" (p. 25). What did Sorel write during this period? What were his concrete views, proposals, observations? What of his resignation from L'Indépendance precisely because he would not be dictated to by Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès? These details are pushed to the side by Shils who continues his guilt by association attack: "Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès," he wrote, "two of the most extreme traditionalist authoritarians and nationalists in France, were on the editorial council of L'Indépendance of which Sorel was co-editor from 1911 to 1913" (p. 25). Sorel died in 1922, Shils concluded ". . . a little before

the march on Rome by his Italian admirers and their barbarous cohorts" (p. 26). The conclusion to this preparation for a reading of Reflections on Violence charged that

Sorel gave moral legitimacy to the characteristic procedures of apocalyptic politics . . . extremists and dissidents of every sort have found something congenial in his writings. . . . Reflections on Violence discloses a morally and politically pernicious standpoint. Its republication in America . . . will have its justification if it makes us aware of the many ways in which the present political attitudes and actions of those who place themselves on the side of the free society are corrupted by the apocalyptic view of history and society. (p. 29)

A more tragically inept introduction to the thought of Georges Sorel would be hard to imagine.

Preston King, Fear of Power, An Analysis of Anti-Statism in Three French Writers (Frank Cass and Co., 1967).

This study of Tocqueville, Proudhon and Sorel is confined in the case of the latter to an elaboration of Sorel's concept of Syndicalism. It properly indicates Sorel's rejection of the notion of inevitable progress but does not indicate the vital epistemological basis of his sense of indeterminacy. This causes an immediate failure of interpretation when Preston King asserted that " . . . Sorel preached that a proletarian revolution could be made inevitable by inducing the proletariat to accept the frank myth of its inevitability" (p. 75). On the contrary, Sorel always insisted that the myth acted on the present, its fulfillment was

unknowable and certainly not inevitable. The future was always unknown and chance played an enormous role in human affairs. The myth of the imagined future was to be efficacious on the present. Nothing could make, according to Sorel, the future inevitable.

Once again, failing to appreciate Sorel's epistemology and its inherent pessimistic conclusions, Preston King draws a false conclusion " . . . Sorel could not logically escape belief in the idea of progress" (p. 75). Had King understood Sorel's view of logic in the context of the artificial milieu this statement might not have been made. The balance of the essay on Sorel is confined to the political dimension of his thought, which is largely confined to his writings on Syndicalism, as contained in the essays which compose Reflections on Violence. The elaboration of Sorel's thought over this ground appears to be accurate but the conclusion which Preston King draws is highly suspect. "Sorel was . . . very like Michael Bakunin, who was more enamoured of revolutionary upheaval as an activity than as a vehicle of reform" (p. 91). For Sorel who constantly affirmed the value of tradition and the historical development of human morality, the application of Syndicalism to Marxian class conflict was the addition of a mechanism for preparing among the proletariat the development of an ethic of mutuality and cooperation. He sought

through the dynamic of myth to insulate this mechanism such that it could develop an ethical alternative to the present system. The end he sought was not revolutionary activity per se but rather the reverse of Preston's observation appears true: he sought a vehicle of reform.

Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras* (Princeton University Press, 1959).

Sorel so decidedly anti-individualist, whose conception of human life was one of cooperation which emphasized the role of past generations in the accumulation of human works within the man-made artificial milieu hardly fits the characterization which Michael Curtis assigns him in the introduction of his highly suspect analysis: "Sorel," Curtis wrote, ". . . stressed the importance of individual action" (p. 7). "The need for dictatorship," he continued, ". . . the stress on action, even purposeless action, the cult of energy, the concept of the elite . . . even the idea of national socialism--all are to be found in the works of the three (Sorel, Barrès, Maurras) writers" (p. 8). All that is lacking to make this convincing is the documentary evidence, which had it been sought by Curtis would have revealed that Sorel did not advocate dictatorship--his work is distinctively anti-authoritarian; Sorel did not advocate purposeless action or national socialism.

Sorel for Curtis was a confusing unsystematic thinker: "It is not every book on economic problems, he complained, that ends as did Sorel's Introduction à l'économie moderne, with a disquisition on suffering" (p. 52). Thus Sorel's essay which presented the ultimate conclusions of his epistemological valuations was irrelevant to Curtis who considered Sorel's work from a condescending perspective: "All his writings were rough drafts for a book he never wrote" (p. 52). The ensuing discussion of Sorel by Curtis was not as superficial as this remark might indicate. He presents an accurate account of Sorel's political views and understands the concept of myth as Sorel presented it. The attempt to draw Sorel together with Barrès and Maurras is often renounced and special exceptions are given for the discussions which develop Sorel's ideas. As a study which suggests the unity and breadth of Sorel, this work is a failure. His ideas are presented out of the context of their reliance upon carefully studied epistemology and thus they appear random and incoherent. Perhaps Michael Curtis envisioned his project as something other than an attempt to produce an integral account of Sorel's thought. However the value of his attempt to integrate Sorel with Maurras and Barrès is diminished to the extent that his view of Sorel is so partial and thus misleading.

Georges Goriely, Le Pluralisme dramatique de Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1962).

Perhaps the most knowledgeable of the French writers on Sorel, Georges Goriely has produced a highly systematic, chronological study of Sorel which attempts a synthesis of his thought. Unfortunately Goriely gave up the attempt at the half-way point in Sorel's intellectual career and ended his analysis with a hopelessly confused conclusion:

. . . le concept de pluralisme est sans doute le plus général sous lequel il soit possible de définir l'ensemble de l'oeuvre de Sorel. . . . Il est vraiment multiple en tout: multiplicité et irréductibilité des choses, multiplicité des liens entre elles, multiplicité de manières des les considérer; multiplicité des principes moraux, multiplicité des consciences, multiplicité groupements humains, multiplicité des développements historiques. (p. 215)

This conclusion was drawn by Goriely after having examined Sorel's work up to the year 1906! The rest of his intellectual career was dismissed by Georges Goriely (which includes all the material which I have presented in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII) with the following appraisal: "Avouons-le franchement: c'est peu servir la diffusion des idées de Sorel que de s'appesantir sur les écrits des douze dernières années de sa vie" (p. 233). "Rather than communicate to the reader," Goriely concluded, "the irritation, the boredom or the discouragement of the contact with these texts, we have preferred to conclude our detailed analysis with Reflections on Violence"



(p. 223). Thus the study remains a beginning without an end. And the analysis which is presented is weakened by the tendency on the part of the author to see the work of Sorel culminating in Syndicalism. There is a good chapter on Sorel's concept of myth entitled "Mythe et Violence," but it is the last chapter as well. I believe this study may have produced other results had Goriely not visualized Sorel so totally from the perspective of political theory. This narrow view caused, I believe, the exclusion from consideration of many specifically epistemological works by Sorel. His linguistics as well as his views on history, sociology and science are largely ignored.

As a strictly political interpretation it is a sound study, though truncated. The bibliography for the early Sorel is excellent, for the latter part of Sorel's career however it is full of inaccuracies. I enter this complaint along with the admission that the definitive bibliography of Sorel's writings has yet to be produced. I have only succeeded in adding somewhat to the work of Georges Goriely in this regard and am indebted to him as well as to James Meisel and of course to Paul Delesalle whose bibliography of 1930 in the International Review for Social History remains the starting point of all later bibliographic work on Sorel.

Pierre Andreu, Notre Maitre, M. Sorel (Paris: Grasset, 1953).

This is the only source of detailed and documented information about the life of Georges Sorel prior to the commencement of his writing career. In its analysis of his writings themselves its tone is partisan and Andreu's conclusions are doubtful. Sorel is considered by Andreu as one of " . . . les penseurs profond du siècle dernier" a category which he reserved for two other French thinkers: LePlay and Proudhon (p. 291). Sorel's pessimism is rooted, according to Andreu in " . . . son education chrétienne . . . ses réflexions et son expérience de la vie . . . " (p. 293) as well as "les vues pessimistes de Proudhon et de Renan" (p. 293). The epistemological roots of his pessimism are not uncovered by Andreu, who nevertheless is well aware of the recurrent force of the idea in Sorel's speculations. The failure to locate this perspective in Sorel's conception of the possibilities of human existence within the artificial milieu and the limits therein of human knowledge caused Andreu to misunderstand the direction of Sorel's thought which was decidedly anti-dogmatic and which rejected the pursuit of absolute certainty or truth; Andreu believed that Sorel was engaged in a "recherche de la vérité" (p. 302).

This study has the merit of presenting a favorable interpretation of Sorel to counter the more

antagonistic English treatments in so far as it rejects the tendency to see Sorel as a man of the authoritarian right-wing: "Maurras ne le range jamais parmi les maîtres extérieurs de l'Action française et il enseigna toujours à ses disciples à se méfier de lui, comme s'il avait craint qu'ils n'apprissent dans ses oeuvres cette liberté d'esprit que le chef royaliste n'aimait pas beaucoup" (p. 309).

Jean Deroo, Le renversement du matérialisme historique; L'Expérience de Georges Sorel (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1946).

This study advanced the surprising thesis that: "Il faut dire, en effet, que Nietzsche a dû inspirer Sorel. Bien que Sorel ne le cite que rarement, toute son oeuvre s'en ressent. La pensée de Nietzsche est à la base de presque toutes les propositions même sociologiques de Sorel" (p. 222). Why Sorel, who so faithfully reported, throughout his career, the thinkers whose works he had followed, would conceal the most basic influence of all is not explained. This undocumented assertion represents an intuition on the part of Jean Deroo, who thinking to draw the parallel between the two wrote: "Les maîtres créent leur morale" (p. 224). Could this idea be associated with Sorel who repudiated precisely such an idea in his rejection of Aristotle's defense of the man of genius as above the law? The masses for Sorel were the historical fabricators of

morality. Although the value of this study is weakened by the unsuccessful attempt to force the thesis to a demonstration, its discussion of Sorel's rejection of historical materialism appears accurate: ". . . la conception méthodologique du matérialisme historique chez Sorel montre l'impossibilité de ramener tous les facteurs idéologiques à l'argument économique" (p. 226).

Gernand Rossingnol, Pour connaître la pensée de G. Sorel (Paris: Bordas, 1948).

This work is most striking for its organizational approach to Sorel. Chapter II entitled "Intentions fondamentales et thèmes permanents," however, disappoints the expectation that it will provide a comprehensive frame of reference for the lengthy exposition which follows. The "thème du pessimisme" in Chapter II is explained as follows: ". . . c'est aussi sur le plan des valeurs spirituelles et morales que se développe le thème si important" (p. 24). The very material condition of the human species and the intellectual limits of human knowledge are not associated in this treatment of Sorel's perspective of the human condition.

In Chapter IV entitled "la philosophie générale de G. Sorel" I was surprised to find no statement of epistemology, and only the slightest reference to the concept of the artificial and natural milieux. Yet almost every idea with which Sorel dealt is present,

though in a very disassociated way. I am surprised that a study which appears so thorough can produce such an inconclusive effect. Perhaps this results from a defect of style which gives the thought of Sorel a new context: the ideas march like soldiers; they pass in review chapter by chapter, their intensity of presentation which only occurs in the original context is lost in favor of a categorical organization--the persistence of Sorel's preoccupations is never brought to light. Sorel's thought, which exists in the thousands of pages of his articles and books, speeches and letters, is obviously fragmented even when all these parts are juxtaposed, but here in la pensée de Georges Sorel even these fragments have been exploded into ideas which have then been formed into strict categories: all the pieces seem to be there, but the context is missing. There is no active evaluative prospect for the reader of such a work; the book is a funnel flowing with thousands of equally valued facts which results in a most atomized experience of Sorel. Perhaps this explains the synthetic uncertainty which characterizes its discussion of "fundamental intentions and permanent themes."

Jean Wanner, L'idée de Décadence dans la pensée de Georges Sorel (Lusanne: Librairie de Droit, F. Roth et Cie., 1943).

This study was a doctoral thesis presented at the Université de Lusanne. Wanner concluded that "L'idée

de décadence a été . . . le fil d'Ariane qui nous a permis de cheminer sans trop nous égarer à travers le labyrinthe de la pensée sorélienne" (p. 84). The study was admittedly modest in its concentration of this aspect of Sorel's work: "Nous n'avons pas l'illusion d'avoir trouvé l'idée qui permette de découvrir entièrement Sorel" (p. 84). Wanner's hope was to establish that Sorel's career was dominated by a battle against what he viewed as decadence. Another benefit which could be attained through a study of Sorel, Wanner believed, was that " . . . il force à la réflexion, à la méditation . . . il est capable de nous mener à une revision profonde de notre manière de penser" (p. 84).

Sorel's pessimism, according to Wanner, grows out of his belief that "la douleur" is inherent in human life (p. 30). The epistemological roots of this perspective are not traced. The pessimistic view is presented as the primary fact by Wanner. Sorel's distinctions between the artificial and the natural milieux--which provide a comprehension of the limits of human knowledge--together with his critique of the duality of the human mind itself (its dual capacity for belief and knowledge)--are not discussed in a work which thus artificially isolates the idea of decadence in Sorel's mind. This isolation makes decadence seem the central preoccupation rather than an auxiliary of

more basic perspectives. The study is further weakened by the fact that its citations are limited to the book-length works by Sorel--the myriad articles, letters and speeches are not included. Thus the work, while modest in its pretensions remains superficial in its treatment of what appears to be a useful approach to the thought of Sorel.

Max Ascoli, Georges Sorel (Paris: Librairie Paul Deles-salle, 1921).

This study was the result of a conference held at the Université populaire de Ferrare, March 11, 1920. The object of the publication was, according to Max Ascoli, ". . . de vous aider à lire Sorel" (p. 18). Thus as a scholarly study this introduction to Sorel is of little value, there are no footnotes and the references to Sorel's thought are not associated with any specific writing. Sorel is depicted as a man of great integrity who, then at the age of 74, was still involved in the quest for truth. "Sorel," wrote Max Ascoli, "ne pouvait être réformiste, son action ne pouvait être qu'une révolte idéale . . . il devait naturellement prendre position . . . comme philosophe" (p. 27). "La préoccupation essentielle de Sorel fut toujours une préoccupation d'ordre moral, son but, découvrir et lutter contre toutes les formes de la décadence" (p. 28). Sorel's Socialism with its



Syndicalist emphasis was part of what Ascoli envisioned as his battle against decadence in which violence was a tool and not an end. Sorel for Ascoli is thus " . . . un fondateur et chef d'ordre monastique" (p. 44). "Sorel a cru que le socialisme pouvait devenir une philosophie des moeurs" (p. 44).

This narrow moral-political vision of Sorel represents the partisan view of a man who feared that Sorel had become forgotten in his own country. His object was not to elaborate in a careful study the depth and diversity of Sorel's speculations but rather to enhance Sorel's reputation by eulogizing certain aspects of his thought. The result of such an effort has been the production of a short essay which advocates but which does not demonstrate its judgments of Sorel's motive-ideas. Its value as a study of Sorel is highly suspect.

Victor Sartre, Georges Sorel, élites syndicalistes et révolution prolétarienne (Paris: Editions Spes, 1937).

In an attempt to clarify Sorel's thought Victor Sartre undertook an analysis of its philosophical foundations in a chapter entitled "Les fondements philosophique." Initially Sartre wrote: "Nous rencontrerons . . . le pessimisme, pierre fondamentale de l'édifice" (p. 56). Unfortunately the basis of this pessimism Sartre discovered in Sorel's view of human nature, a position distinctly opposed to Sorel's epistemology and

his hostility to the tendency to visualize humanity in terms of human nature: Sartre wrote: "Sorel ne pardonne pas volontiers les vices humains qu'il observe la nature de l'homme" (p. 57).

The subject of the influence of Vico on the thought of Sorel is the least justifiable. In a chapter entitled "la conception de l'histoire," Sartre suggested that Sorel had been especially attracted to Vico's cyclical view of historical recurrence; ". . . Sorel à faire sienne la théorie des renouvellements ou ricorsi de Vico . . . la société entière est soumise à des lois fixes" (p. 96). It was in fact this element in Vico which Sorel most categorically rejected.

The characteristic failing of this study of Sorel is a result of the extent to which certain major themes which Sorel developed are shown to be primary assumptions (pessimism, decadence, myth) their epistemological ground (Sorel's theory of knowledge, his bifurcated conception of the natural and artificial milieux, his critique of language) is not elaborated and thus the whole edifice of his thought appears superficial--a collection of unfounded prejudices. This complaint does not deny all value to Sartre's study, which contains many very excellent observations in the domain of Sorel's political thought, however

the general synthetic view of Sorel is so uncertain without the frame of reference which Sorel so persistently insisted upon.

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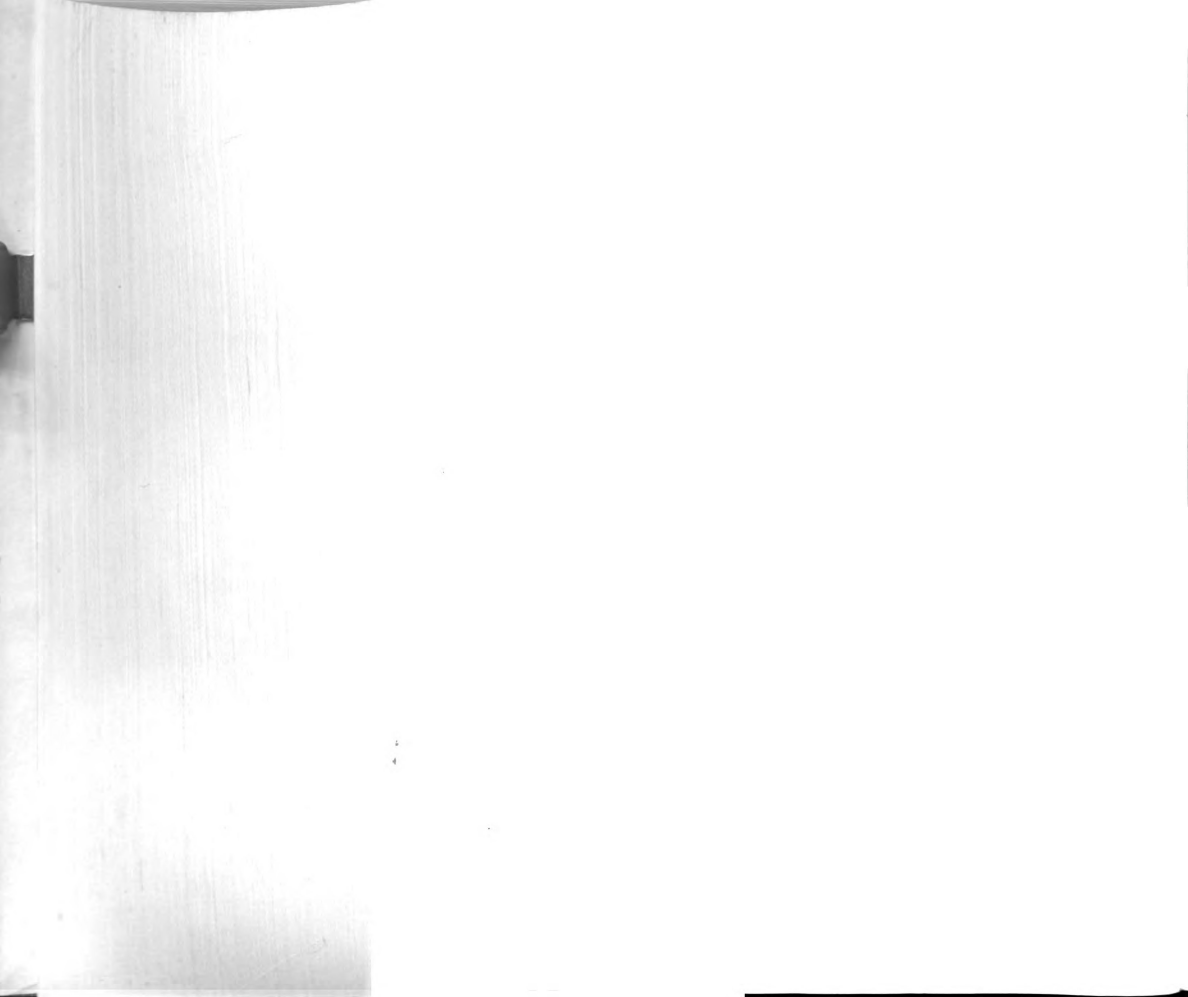
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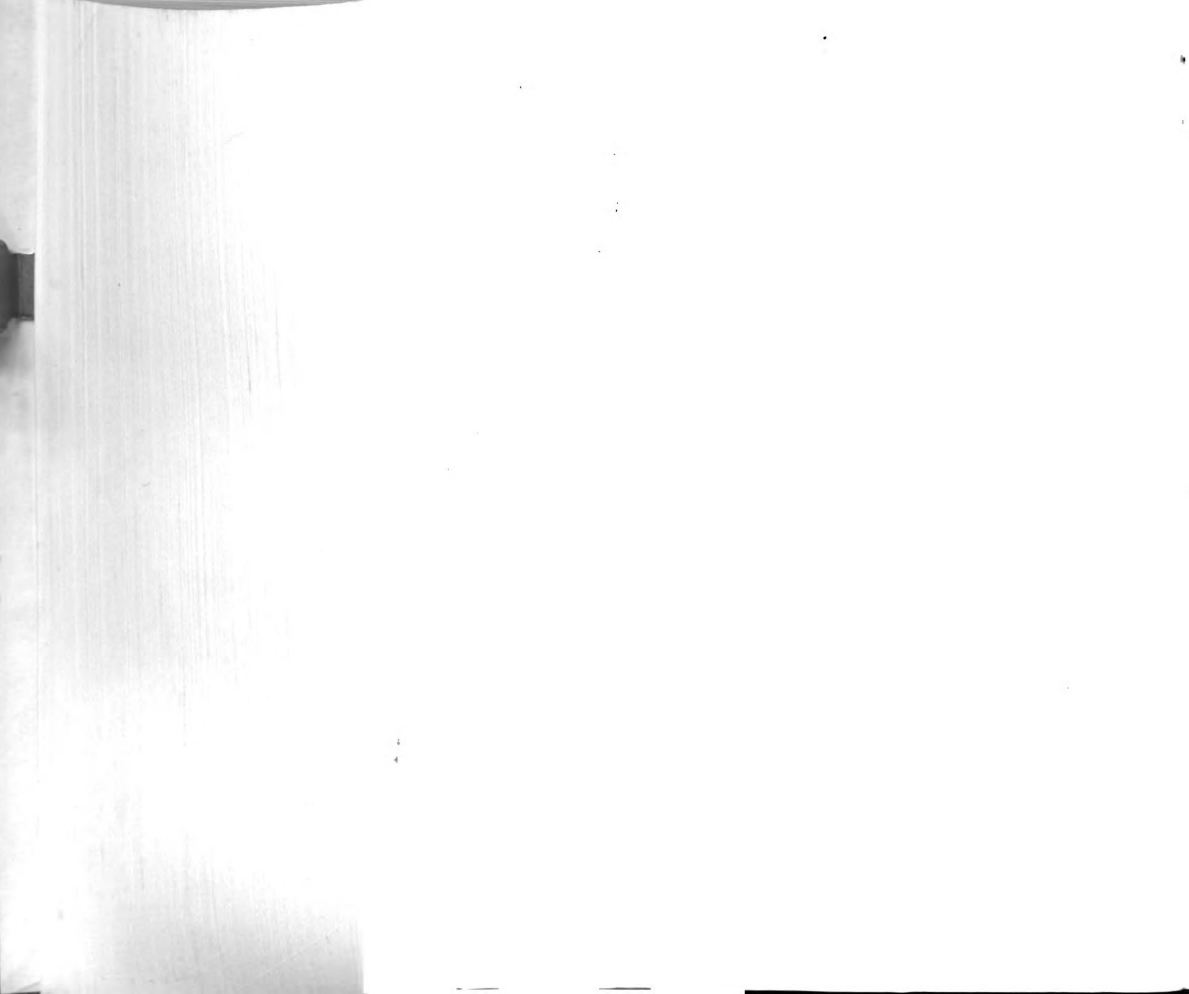
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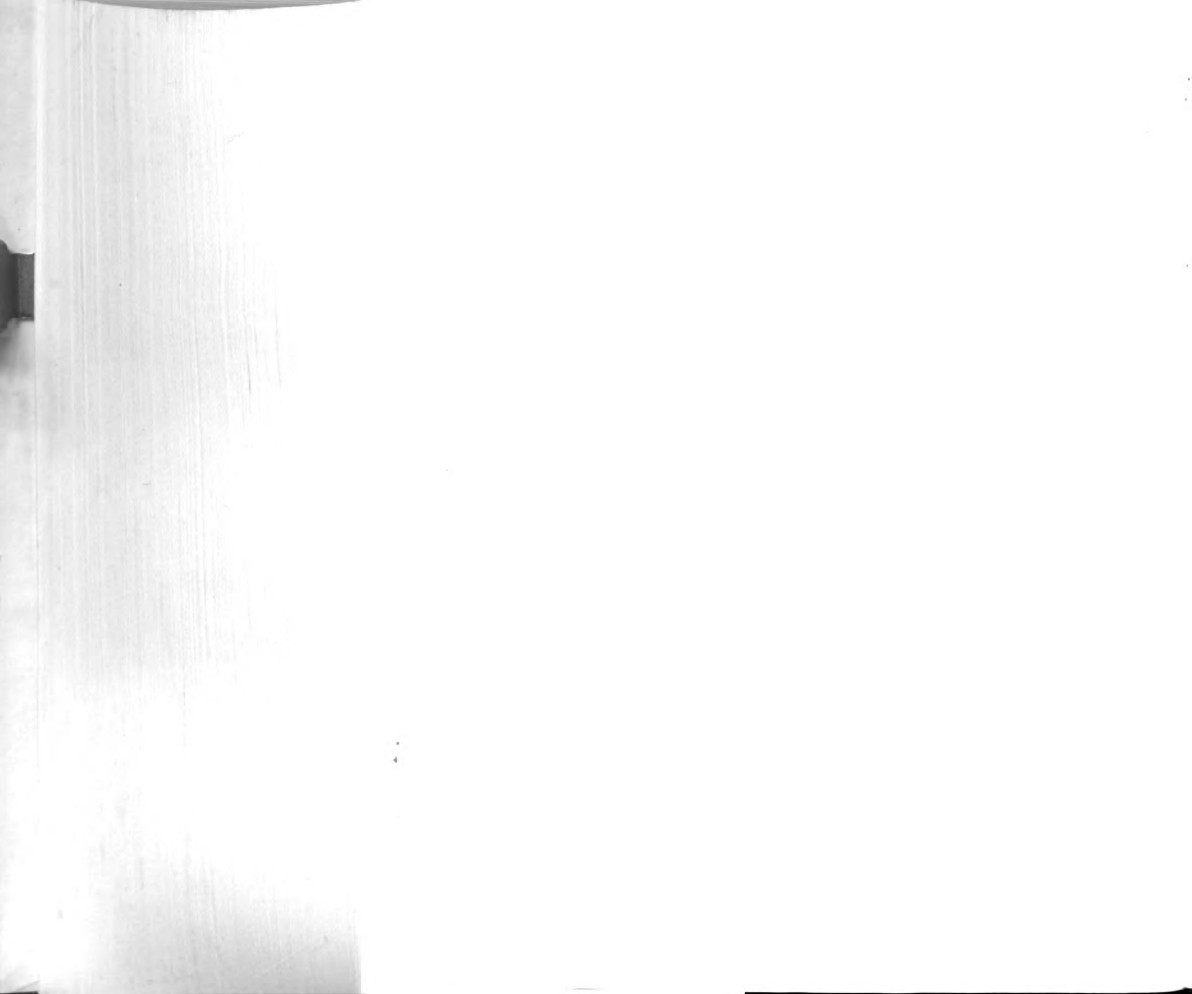


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