



## THE CITIZEN'S VOICE: TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLITICS AND LITERATURE

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## We Are Not Immortal

Paul Johnson's *A History of the Modern World* begins its tale of the twentieth century on May 29, 1919, when photographs of a solar eclipse, taken on an island off West Africa and in Brazil, corroborated Einstein's special theory of relativity. This is indeed a good starting point because the theory of relativity symbolizes, mainly as a result of the mix-up between "relativity" and "relativism," the fading hope for a world comprehended by common sense. Just as the linearity of space was challenged by Einstein, so were social, economic, and political truisms, e.g., the assumption, held by foreign ministries in the nineteenth century that the international system operates in accordance with Newtonian rules assuring a "balance of power."

Johnson shows how the falsification of physical theorems considered absolute for two hundred years, accompanied by Freud's contention that human beings are irrational and the Marxist belief in economic determinism, led to confusion:

Marx, Freud, Einstein all conveyed the same message to the 1920s: the world was not what it seemed. The senses, whose empirical perceptions shaped our ideas of time and distance, right and wrong, law and justice, and the nature of man's behavior in society, were not to be trusted. Moreover, Marxist and Freudian analysis combined to undermine, in their different ways, the highly developed sense of personal responsibility, and of duty towards a settled and objectively true moral code, which was at the centre of nineteenth century European civilization.<sup>1</sup>

These cultural uncertainties, as well as the political uncertainty of the early twentieth century caused by colonial expeditions that disturbed the European peace, led to the angst described in many writings of the era. In his autobiography, Stephan Zweig shows how his life, as a person born into nineteenth-century European civilization with its stable class system and fixed moral codes, was affected:

We, who have been hounded through all the rapids of life, we who have been torn loose from all roots that held us, we, always beginning anew when we have been driven to the end, we, victims and yet willing servants of unknown, mystic forces, we, for whom comfort has become a saga and security a childhood dream, we have felt the tension from pole to pole and the eternal dread of the eternal new in every fibre of our being.<sup>2</sup>

Nobody expresses that "eternal dread of the eternal new" more forcefully than Thomas Mann in *The Magic Mountain*. Mann was seen as "a seismograph, delicately measuring the quaking earth of his century."<sup>3</sup> As Michael Harrington notes:

Mann is the most relevant to a study of the contemporary decadence. He lived through all the unnerving transitions of the period: the turn of the century, World War I, the stultification of the German middle class, the rise of fascism, World War II, and the Cold War. Not only did he write of these incredible times; the times wrote his life as if it were one of his novels. In

his tempestuous fusion of autobiography and art, the inability of a culture to understand its own revolution becomes personal and evocative.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Mann was born in the German town of Lübeck in 1875. His father, a senator in the local government, died in 1890, and shortly afterwards the family moved to Munich, where Thomas worked as an unpaid apprentice clerk in a fire insurance company. His first short stories were published in 1894, and in 1901 he published *Buddenbrooks* on the declining German bourgeoisie. During World War I he supported imperial Germany, which represented to him a conservative, romantic, harmonious soul in contrast to the shallow democracies fighting against her. After the war he was a main supporter of the Weimar Republic, which, as is well known, very much lacked such support. In 1924 *The Magic Mountain* was published, and in 1929 Thomas Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. In 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, he settled in Switzerland and became known for his anti-Nazi stand, which resulted in the annulment of his German citizenship and the burning of his books. In 1938 he emigrated to the United States where he completed the *Joseph* series and published *Dr. Faustus*. In 1952, during the McCarthy era, he left the United States and settled in Kilchberg, near Zürich, where he died in 1955.

*The Magic Mountain* was conceived in 1912 when Mann's wife Katia, following an attack of tuberculosis, was hospitalized in a forest sanatorium in Davos where he spent three weeks with her. The people he encountered in the sanatorium did not seem to recover, and he himself caught a troublesome bronchial cold, which inspired him to write a humorous novella on this experience that developed into the long novel. Katia Mann's memoirs reveal that many of the figures appearing in the novel were real: the ordinary Frau Stöhr, the door slamming Madame Chauchat, and the aggrieved mother lamenting the fatal illness of both her sons.<sup>5</sup> The central characters were not real persons, although similarities between the Italian Settembrini and Thomas Mann's brother, the writer Heinrich Mann, or between the Jewish Jesuit Naphta and the Marxist critic Georg Lukács have been noted.<sup>6</sup>

An analysis of the political theory in *The Magic Mountain* requires a word of caution; it is one of the most important and complex novels ever written and can be analyzed from many angles: as a spiritual autobiography,

an historical novel, a fable about a declining European civilization, or a pedagogical novel within the tradition of the German "*Bildungsroman*." A political analysis of this work obviously captures only a limited dimension of it.

*The Magic Mountain* is the tale of Hans Castorp, "a simple-minded though pleasing young man,"<sup>7</sup> who had just passed his exams in naval engineering and, when the book begins, is on his way to visit his cousin Joachim in the Berghof sanitarium in Davos. Hans does not resemble any of the characters we are familiar with from nineteenth-century literature; he is not a nobleman, a declining aristocrat, a proletarian, a landowner, or an individual confronting a corrupt political system. He is neither a hero nor a villain. Hans Castorp is a young, ordinary man, possessed with Nietzschean inquisitiveness, who lived an ordinary life with all its "duties, interests, cares and prospects"<sup>8</sup> in the world preceding the Great War.

The story of Hans Castorp, beginning with his climbing up the magic mountain, enables us to climb with him "upward into regions where he had never before drawn breath, and where he knew that unusual living conditions prevailed."<sup>9</sup> The living conditions in Berghof, where the entire book is placed, are unusual indeed. In that strange place, where snow falls in August, the world is observed, not experienced.<sup>10</sup> It is a cosmopolitan world inhabited by diverse types who share a common denominator: they are all sick. And their sickness lacks the delicacy with which maladies were often treated in novels: everybody is simply sick.<sup>11</sup>

The focus on sickness is crucial to an understanding of the fundamental view of body and soul in this novel; health and sickness, life and death, are strongly linked. One of the first pieces of information Hans Castorp is exposed to on the magic mountain concerns the bringing down of the bodies of the dead on bobsleds. When he visits Herr Hofrat Behrens, we are told that Hans had become an engineer by chance and could have actually become a physician, because "if you are interested in the body, you must be interested in disease."<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere he learns that "if one is interested in life, one must be particularly interested in death."<sup>13</sup> The human body, so admired in ancient Greece, in the Renaissance, or in modern sport culture, entirely loses its status in this book, as a result of scientific research which reveals its true essence: "The human body," Herr Behrens explains to the attentive Hans, "consists, much the larger part of it, of water. No more and no less than water, and

nothing to get wrought up about. The solid parts are only twenty-five per cent of the whole, and of that twenty are ordinary white of egg, protein, if you want to use a handsomer word. Besides that, a little fat and a little salt, that's about all."<sup>14</sup>

Man, the creature adored by all religions and philosophies, becomes in Hofrat's explanation no more than primary substances such as carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur, and phosphorous. In old age, the Hofrat explains, the flesh becomes tough because the collagen increases in the connective tissue – the lime, which is the most important constituent of the bones and cartilage, and in the muscle plasma we have an albumen called fibrin, which, when it coagulates in the muscular tissue, causes death. Thus, in this novel even death loses its romantic dignity and becomes a subject for "the anatomy of the grave,"<sup>15</sup> which reveals that it is nothing other than a process in which "you flow away, so to speak – remember all that water."<sup>16</sup>

Many theologians and philosophers would agree with Mann about the inferiority of the human body but would cherish the human consciousness. Hegel in particular influenced the placing of consciousness at the center stage of philosophy. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this influential nineteenth-century German thinker described the dialectical process in which our consciousness of ourselves and of the world develops, with reason being the central factor shaping our lives. To Hegel, reason is a high form of self-consciousness that allows us to establish ethical social institutions and political orders.<sup>17</sup> But Hans Castorp, ordering scientific volumes to read in the long winter days at Berghof, learns that responses to stimuli, which represent a degree of consciousness, can already be found in the lowest animal forms, including those lacking a nervous system or a cerebrum. In a parody on Hegel, consciousness is defined as nothing but the senseless and aimless activity of matter turned self-conscious:

Consciousness, then, was simply a function of matter organized into life; a function that in higher manifestations turned upon its avatar and became an effort to explore and explain the phenomenon it displayed – a hopeful-hopeless project of life to achieve self-knowledge, nature in recoil – and vainly, in the event, since she cannot be resolved in knowledge, nor life, when all is said, listen to itself.<sup>18</sup>

This quotation may be seen as directed at all those who arrogantly stressed the supremacy of reason over nature. Such arrogance could be found both in the church that subordinated the body to the soul and in humanism of the kind expressed by Voltaire when he protested, in the name of reason, against the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. In *The Magic Mountain*, many of the scientific and technological developments of the turn of the century, taken to symbolize the victory of human reason over nature, and promising to liberate civilization from the traditional constraints of nature and history, are presented as absurd, once seen from the perspective of the inquisitive Hans Castorp. In particular, the young man exposes the pretence of positivist sociology, redeeming psychoanalysis, and X-ray, one of the greatest achievements of medical science at the time.

The origins of sociology go back a long way, but the subjection of society to positivist study can be traced to the nineteenth century French scholar Auguste Comte who formulated the “law of human progress.”<sup>19</sup> According to that law, each of our leading conceptions passes successfully through three stages: a theological stage in which all phenomena are attributed to the immediate action of supernatural beings; a metaphysical stage in which abstract forces replace those metaphysical beings as causes of all phenomena; and third, a positivist stage in which “the mind has given over the vain search after absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws – that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.”<sup>20</sup> Comte proposed the combination of reasoning and observation as the means of knowledge both of physiological and social facts. He tied this positivism to the French Revolution, arguing that the shock of revolution was necessary for the foundation of a social science, since the basis of that science is the conception of human progress. Not only did the revolution bring that conception forward into sufficient prominence, the discourse it sparked led the public to look to positivism as a system containing in germ the ultimate solution to social problems.

Early sociologists have mostly accepted this link between positivism and social progress. As Alan Swingewood shows, positivism, embracing a belief in science as the foundation of all knowledge, the employment of statistical analysis in social theory, and the search for causal explanations of social phenomena, originated in the enlightenment and carried its fundamental

tenets of philosophical individualism and human reason largely directed against the irrational powers of the absolutist state, organized religion, and residual social institutions.<sup>21</sup> In the early twentieth century, when the irrational powers of the masses were seen as more frightening than those of the state and religious institutions, the answer still resided with positivist sociology. Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim, and others developed a science of sociology that could be seen as an attempt to rescue mass society from the ills of charisma, conflict, and ideology.

The need to consider the wishes, passions, interests, and desires of the general public led to a body of literature revealing irrational trends in human affairs. Mass conduct was characterized by “unpredictability, violence, volatility and destructiveness.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, while some thinkers ventured to consider the newly revealed irrationality as socially destructive, others, notably Durkheim, placed them into formulas consistent with the still prevalent notion of social progress. Mass sentiments became the staff holding social contracts together, and communal rituals – a unifying and energizing social force. As one of Durkheim’s biographers notes, throughout his work on pre-modern, pre-literate social behaviors, the master sociologist remained “a man of science, committed to the view that reason should and could objectively ascertain, criticize, improve social conditions.”<sup>23</sup>

However, while master sociologists pursued their endeavor with curiosity over mass behavior and concern for the fate of European civilization, many of their disciples turned the project into an experiment in analytical and quantitative science. The complex behavior of twentieth-century mass societies was to be captured by statistical methods whose usefulness seemed to be diminishing with their apparent methodological sophistication. The study of society, known as “social sciences,” developed into what cultural historian Jacques Barzun calls “endless specialties.”<sup>24</sup>

This trend would have remained of little concern had its practitioners not defined themselves as the vanguard of human progress. Social engineering, based on the achievements of social scientists, was seen as a sober alternative to the grand ideologies haunting humanity in the twentieth century. An alternative was desperately needed, especially in the era between the two world wars. But the statistically oriented economists, sociologists, and political scientists were incapable of providing it, because, as Barzun notes, their methods required too many abstractions: “It is not unfair to say that



the present culture conducts its business largely like the inhabitants of Swift's island of Laputa, who hovered in the air over the solid earth beneath."<sup>25</sup>

The unease over the gap between the promise of sociology to become an advance guard protecting human progress and its dispersion into innumerable activities of questionable social validity is expressed by Hans Castorp in his encounter with the Italian Settembrini who represents a shallow version of Voltairean humanism. Settembrini considers buying Hofrat Behren for Christmas a newly projected encyclopedic work called *Sociology of Suffering*. This book, about which Hans Castorp learns from Settembrini in a reading room with oak paneling and a light, vaulted ceiling, contains the ambitious effort of the new science of sociology to apply a twentieth-century version of the enlightenment, in the form of positivistic research which improves the human condition by classifying and measuring it.

Curious Hans learns from Settembrini about the International League for the Organization of Progress that has composed the encyclopedia. The league deduced from Darwinian theory that man's profoundest natural impulse is in the direction of self-realization, and assembled those, like Settembrini, who sought satisfaction of this impulse and were willing to become co-workers in the cause of human progress:

A comprehensive and scientifically executed programme has been drawn up, embracing all the projects for human improvement conceivable at the moment. We are studying the problem of our health as a race, and the means for combating the degeneration which is a regrettable accompanying phenomenon of our increasing industrialization.<sup>26</sup>

The aims are broad: to provide people with access to universities, resolve the class conflicts and do away with national conflicts, but the means are those familiar to every social scientist: discussion groups, sending material to progressive political parties, and establishment of international periodicals – “monthly reviews, which contain articles in three or four languages on the subject of the progressive evolution of civilized humanity.”<sup>27</sup>

The critique of the ambitions of sociology reaches a peak when Settembrini discusses a League meeting in Barcelona at which the encyclopedia was conceived:

[T]he League for the Organization of Progress, mindful of its task of furthering human happiness – in other words, of combating human suffering by the available social methods, to the end of finally eliminating it altogether; mindful also of the fact that this lofty task can only be accomplished by the aid of sociology, the end and aim of which is the perfect State, the League, in session at Barcelona, determined upon the publication of a series of volumes bearing the general title: *The Sociology of Suffering*. It should be the aim of the series to classify human suffering according to classes and categories, and to treat it systematically and exhaustively. You ask what is the use of classification, arrangement, systematization? I answer you: order and simplification are the first steps toward the mastery of a subject – the actual enemy is the unknown.<sup>28</sup>

The novelist exposes the gap between sociology's ambitions and the simplification with which it treats its subject matter – the human condition. Scholars, research assistants, statisticians and others who joined in the twentieth-century positivist endeavor accompanying the modern industrial state have often considered themselves, after Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, as "co-workers" in an updated enlightenment project. Mannheim, deeply concerned over the destructive nature of communism and fascism, proposed in 1929 a "sociology of knowledge" whose practitioners overcome the fundamental falsities and authoritarianism of the age's ideological structures by an open-minded investigation of these structures as part of an overall sociological project.<sup>29</sup> But Hans Castorp conveys his unease over the simplifying nature of sociology's research methods, often expressed by first-year students before they are socialized into the field, as well as the scant power of sociology to enlighten the human race. No wonder that Settembrini, suggesting to the Berghof's residents that they buy this encyclopedia as a gift, "found only one person to agree with him, a book-dealer who sat at Hermine Kleefeld's table."<sup>30</sup>

That unease increases when Castorp is exposed to psychoanalysis, an even greater promise for the liberation of civilization. In *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas highlights that promise. Psychoanalysis, he writes, served as the virtual epiphany for the early-twentieth-century mind as it brought to light the archaeological depths of the psyche, thereby representing

a brilliant culmination of the Enlightenment project, bringing even human consciousness under the light of rational investigation.<sup>31</sup> Tarnas realizes that this was only part of the impact of psychoanalysis, for it also undermined the entire Enlightenment project. This was done by the revelation of Freud, who developed psychoanalysis and turned it into a world movement, that below or beyond the rational mind existed an overwhelmingly potent repository of non-rational forces. With Freud, “the Darwinian struggle with nature took on new dimensions, as man was now constrained to live in eternal struggle with his own nature.”<sup>32</sup>

In other words, Freud’s penetration into the depths of the human psyche – the dreams, the neurosis, the sexual drives, the myths, etc. – while condemning individuals to a self-conscious existence, had also liberated them. As Carl Schorske puts it in his study of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, “Freud gave his fellow-liberals an a-historical theory of man and society that could make bearable a political world spun out of orbit and beyond control.”<sup>33</sup>

Thomas Mann was well aware of the liberating power of psychoanalysis. In a speech he delivered in Vienna in 1936 on Freud’s eightieth birthday, he said:

We shall one day recognize in Freud’s life-work the cornerstone for the building of a new anthropology and therewith of a new structure, to which many stones are being brought up today, which shall be the future dwelling of a wiser and freer humanity.<sup>34</sup>

The humanism based on Freud, Mann believed, will differ from the humanism of the past in its different relation to the powers of the lower world, the unconscious, the id: “a relation bolder, freer, blither, productive of a riper art than any possible in our neurotic, fear-ridden, hate-ridden world.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, the novelist objected to the turning of psychoanalysis into a myth, emphasizing instead the skepticism and modesty it implied to him:

The analytic revelation is a revolutionary force. With it a blithe skepticism has come into the world, a mistrust that unmasks all the schemes and subterfuges of our own souls.<sup>36</sup>

As is well known, the dissemination of psychoanalysis in twentieth-century culture did not involve such skepticism and modesty. Despite vast critique of Freud's assumptions and statements, the preoccupation with the unconscious, which already excited the public mind in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, was accompanied by an aura of mysticism as it developed into a main trait in twentieth-century literature, art, and popular culture. Freud has become bigger than life. To quote English poet W. H. Auden: "to us he is no more a person/now but a whole climate of opinion/under which we conduct our different lives."<sup>37</sup>

In a special issue of the *Annual of Psychoanalysis* in 2001 devoted to Freud's impact on literature and literary criticism, drama, cinema, visual arts, religious studies, the human sciences, etc., the editors claim that we see ourselves and everything around us from a perspective that did not exist in the pre-Freudian era.

We know that all people have motivations of which they are unaware. A person's inner life (dreams, fantasies, private thoughts) is as important as the external life.... Today there may be as many people as ever who find sexuality disquieting, but there is no longer a pretence that it is an incidental part of life. In law attention is paid to a defendant's state of mind. In the cinema even action films are expected to give some consideration to psychological motivation.<sup>38</sup>

And one Internet site has it that "[m]ore than Einstein or Watson and Crick, more than Hitler or Lenin, Roosevelt or Kennedy, more than Picasso, Eliot, or Stravinsky, more than the Beatles or Bob Dylan, Freud's influence on modern culture has been profound and long-lasting."<sup>39</sup>

*The Magic Mountain* exposes the myth accompanying psychoanalysis. Hans Castorp warns us not to be entrapped by its magic spell, as so many mythical cults in the past have failed to redeem us. In a chapter entitled "analysis," Hans listens to a lecture by Dr. Krokowski, whose special field is the psychoanalysis of love. The audience is unusually attentive: "Many of the guests had their hands curved behind their ears; some even held the hand in the air half-way thither, as though arrested midway in the gesture by the strength of their concentration."<sup>40</sup> This attentiveness is related to the

innovation introduced by psychoanalysis, allowing the public mention of sexual themes dressed in pseudo-scientific terms:

It was a bit odd, to be sure, listening to a lecture on such a theme, when previously Hans Castorp's courses had dealt only with such matters as geared transmission in ship-building. No, really, how did one go about to discuss a subject of this delicate and private nature, in broad daylight, before a mixed audience? Dr. Krokowski did it by adopting a mingled terminology, partly poetic and partly erudite; ruthlessly scientific, yet with a vibrating, singsong delivery, which impressed young Hans Castorp as being unsuitable, but may have been the reason why the ladies looked flushed and the gentlemen flicked their ears to make them hear better.<sup>41</sup>

The religious overtones of the experience are apparent in the portrayal of Krokowski as a biblical figure dressed in a frock coat, negligee collar, sandals, and gray woolen socks, delivering a biblical sermon, inflicting the fear of God on the audience: "He demolished illusions, he was ruthlessly enlightened, he relentlessly destroyed all faith in the dignity of silver hairs and the innocence of the sucking babe."<sup>42</sup> The struggle between love as an unreliable instinct prone to error and perversion, and chastity as a corrective force promoting order and conformity, is discussed, as is the tendency of love, once suppressed, to reappear in the form of illness.

As this goes on, Hans Castorp's attention is easily diverted to Madame Chauchet, who is seated in front of him. Boredom is the main message he conveys to us as the sermon goes on and on, with Krokowski, his arms outstretched and his head on one side, reminiscent of Christ on the cross:

It seemed that at the end of his lecture Dr. Krokowski was making propaganda for psycho-analysis; with open arms he summoned all and sundry to come unto him. "Come unto me," he was saying, though not in those words, "come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy-laden." And he left no doubt of his conviction that all those present *were* weary and heavy-laden. He spoke of secret suffering, of shame and sorrow, of the redeeming power of the analytic. He advocated the bringing of light into the unconscious

mind and explained how the abnormality was metamorphosed into the conscious emotion; he urged them to have confidence; he promised relief.<sup>43</sup>

The same kind of irony versus the great promises of the age can be found when Hans Castorp is introduced to medical technologies intended to cure the sick. "X-ray anatomy, you know, triumph of the age."<sup>44</sup> says the Hofrat Behren when the two cousins, Hans and Joachim, visit him in Berghof's X-ray laboratory. Hans is both enchanted and fearful upon his first visit to an X-ray darkroom:

It smelled very odd in here, the air was filled with a sort of stale ozone. The built-in structure, projecting between the two black-hung windows, divided the room into two unequal parts. Hans Castorp could distinguish physical apparatus. Lenses, switchboards, towering measuring-instruments, a box like a camera on a rolling stand, glass diapositives in rows set in the walls. Hard to say whether this was a photographic studio, a dark-room, or an inventor's workshop and technological witches' kitchen.<sup>45</sup>

The notion of science and technology as originating in a "witches' kitchen" is a common theme in early twentieth-century literature. More than reflecting an anti-technological attitude, it indicated a degree of fascination with science and technology. The capacity of the market and the state to embrace technological development to the extent they did was due to public fascination with the images associated with it: the racing car, the nuclear mushroom, the space rocket, "star wars," the glittering computer screen-protector, etc. The lengthy descriptions of medical science and technology in *The Magic Mountain* may have also contributed to that fascination, but Hans Castorp sends us an effective warning. Just like the biblical warning "Thou shalt not look at me and live," we are forced to look at ourselves while we are playing God.

In a chapter entitled "Sudden Enlightenment," Hans Castorp is literally taking a look at himself. The more the laboratory is presented to him in detail, including the entire equipment, motions, smells, even the doctors' jokes ("I expect, Castorp, you feel a little nervous about exposing your inner

self to our gaze? Don't be alarmed, we preserve all the amenities"),<sup>46</sup> the more unfamiliar the setting becomes. We the readers following Castorp are forced to confront ourselves as we undergo, as part of the triumph of the age, the transformation from "Man" to "God." And we are left terrified. What is so terrifying is not the technology itself, which seems mild and tame compared to later technologies, such as the atomic bomb, but the realization that its development and use implies the passing of a threshold beyond which innocent life is no longer possible. With the X-ray machine and similar inventions, the human race has eaten from the fruit of the tree of knowledge and can no longer hide behind a veil of ignorance about its fate. The "sudden enlightenment" in the chapter's title, refers to Hans Castorp's realization that he is going to die.

This dispels the illusion that the forces of nature can be tamed for the benefit of humanity without serious consequences. The scene in which Joachim is being X-rayed resembles Dante's inferno:

"Now, for the space of two seconds, fearful powers were in play – streams of thousands, of a hundred thousand of volts, Hans Castorp seemed to recall – which were necessary to pierce through solid matter. They could hardly be confined to their office, they tried to escape through other outlets: there were explosions like pistol-shots, blue sparks on the measuring apparatus; long lightnings crackled along the walls. Somewhere in the room appeared a red light, like a threatening eye, and a phial in Joachim's rear filled with green. Then everything grew quiet...."<sup>47</sup>

And when Hans himself presses his chest against the X-ray board, he understands how much he actually changes with the technology. "We must first accustom the eyes," the Hofrat is saying to him in the darkness, "We must get big pupils, like a cat's, to see what we want to see. You understand, our everyday eyesight would not be good enough for our purposes. We have to banish the bright daylight and its pretty pictures out of our minds."<sup>48</sup>

The cost involved in taming the forces of nature remains undefined. It resides mainly in the power given to humanity to see through the illusions that protected it in the past. Once Hans Castorp is given the opportunity to see his brother's honor-loving heart in an X-ray picture, an illusion is gone

and he finds himself in the condition of the long dead woman “who had been endowed or afflicted with a heavy gift, which she bore in all humility: namely, that the skeletons of persons about to die would appear before her.”<sup>49</sup> It becomes very clear how much the power given to us by technology requires choices we may not be willing or prepared to make.

Indeed, while life-curing and life-extending technologies are becoming commonplace, the choices they force upon us are still mainly handled by avoidance. The medical doctor, for example, who, like the above woman, is given control over life and death by machines extending life artificially is mostly reluctant to make the necessary decisions, and so are the courts, the church, the press, etc. This condition was foreseen by Hans Castorp’s concern over what he saw in the X-ray lab, or more precisely, over the very fact that he saw it. Standing in the dark, Hans Castorp began to doubt, as do so many individuals in the technological age, whether he should have stood there at all gazing at the secrets of nature, for he understood what he was looking at: “he looked into his own grave.”<sup>50</sup>

Hans Castorp also exposes the difficulty the prevailing ideologies had in coping with the politics of the twentieth century. A large part of the book consists of a conversation he listens to between Settembrini and Naphta who represent opposed clusters of ideas expressed in the history of political philosophy.

Who are the two disputants? Settembrini, the mellifluous democrat, has been compared to a character out of a Heinrich Mann novel, and Naphta, the repellent provocateur, to a character worthy of Dostoevsky or Joseph Conrad.<sup>51</sup> The Italian Settembrini, whose grandfather was a political agitator in Milan dedicated to national liberation, whose father was a classical scholar and humanist, and who himself is a resident of the Berghof sanitarium, advocates a liberal nationalism of the Mazzini school based on belief in progress and reason. He thinks that the development of science, based on pure knowledge, provides for the victory of Man over nature as well as for the coming together of peoples in a world in which prejudice would be replaced by fraternity and happiness. Settembrini advocates the right of nations to self-determination and is convinced that once all nations are granted freedom and independence, they will be capable of living in a peaceful world. He never doubts the existence of the human spirit, deriving its existence from Rousseau and other eighteenth-century thinkers who believe the individual



to be originally good, happy, and without sin. Social errors have corrupted and perverted humanity, but with the advancement of knowledge, a good, happy, and sinless existence is assured.

Naphta, the small, thin, ugly Jesuit of Jewish origin, with his hooked nose dominating his face, his narrow, pursed mouth and pale-gray eyes, expresses the quest for redemption underlying political theory since Rousseau, especially Marxism.

To him, Rousseau's ideal is nothing but a sophisticated adaptation of the Church's doctrine of the fall from the City of God that ought to be restored. Naphta does not believe in pure knowledge; pure science is to him a myth. The vehicle of knowledge is faith, and intellect plays a secondary role – that of exploring the human will, which is always in existence, even in the formulation of science's own rules of evidence. Truth coincides with the human interest, with the quest of redemption. Any theoretical science that has no practical application to that salvation is therefore insignificant and cannot serve as a basis of hope. In contrast to Settembrini, who seeks the liberation of humankind from the unenlightened ideas of the historical church, he thinks that it was not the church that defended darkness but rather a natural science that tried to advance without taking human salvation into account.

The application of these contrasting ideas to politics exposes the impasse that twentieth-century political theory had reached. Settembrini argues against Naphta that the introduction of the idea of redemption in a political context gives rise to the greatest evils because the salvation of the state becomes the main standard:

The good, the true, and the just, is that which advantages the State: its safety, its honour, its power form the sole criterion of morality. Well and good. But mark that herewith you fling open the door for every sort of crime to enter; while as for human truth, individual justice, democracy, you can see what will become of them –<sup>52</sup>

But Naphta argues the opposite: it was the belief in God that kept the state in its place while the Renaissance, by abolishing the dualism between man and God and by developing the notion of the cosmos as infinite, allowed for the sanctification of the state. Settembrini's answer consists mainly of Voltairean slogans:

To find in the Renaissance the origin of State-worship – what bastard logic! The achievements wrung from the past – I use the word literally, my dear sir – wrung from the past by the Renaissance and the intellectual revival are personality, freedom, and the rights of man.<sup>53</sup>

Hans and Joachim, the bystanders, meet these slogans of the enlightenment with approval but Naphta raises a hard point. While admitting that the liberal norms of individualism and the humanistic conception of citizenship were products of the Renaissance, he reminds Settembrini that the Renaissance is a thing of the past, “while the feet of those who will deal them the *coup de grâce* are already before the door.”<sup>54</sup> These words, published in 1924, are perhaps the strongest in *The Magic Mountain*. The Jesuit announces that the principle of freedom has outlived its usefulness and adherence to it, by the educational system for example, may provide it with a temporary rhetorical advantage, but is hopeless:

All educational organizations worthy of the name have always recognized what must be the ultimate and significant principle of pedagogy: namely the absolute mandate, the iron bond, discipline, sacrifice, the renunciation of the ego, the curbing of the personality. And lastly, it is an unloving miscomprehension of youth to believe that it finds its pleasure in freedom: its deepest pleasure lies in obedience.... Liberation and development of the individual are not the key to our age, they are not what our age demands. What it needs, what it wrestles after, what it will create – is Terror.<sup>55</sup>

As the conversation progresses, both discussants bring up their models of the just state. Settembrini expresses in diminishing vigor his vision of the enlightenment while Naphta, in a blend of Roman Catholicism and revolutionary Marxism, proposes equality and fraternity to be achieved by a proletariat replacing the capitalistic system with a violent version of the universal Christian state. Naphta claims that papal religious zeal burns within the proletariat and that it will therefore not refrain from the shedding of

blood. Its task is to strike terror in order to redeem the world and make it sacred, stateless, and classless.

Where is Hans Castorp, the simple fellow, the potential beneficiary of the ideological schemes, in all that? After listening to the endless exchange of statements and counter-statements, he comes to the conclusion that none of the models makes sense, that it is impossible to judge which of the contenders is right and which is wrong, which is a sinner and which is a believer. And it becomes clear what the consequences of such failure to reach agreement on the truth are:

They broke off at last. There were no limits to the subject – but they could not go on for ever. The three guests of the Berghof took their way home, and the two disputants had to go into the cottage together, the one to seek his silken cell, the other his humanistic cubby-hole with the pulpit-desk and the water-bottle. Hans Castorp betook himself to his balcony, his ears full of the hurly-burly and the clashing of arms, as the army of Jerusalem and that of Babylon, under the *dos banderas*, came on in battle array, and met each other midst tumult and shoutings.<sup>56</sup>

By considering ideological discourse to be deadlocked and war as the only consequence of that deadlock, Thomas Mann seemed to join a trend among European intellectuals described by cultural historian Ronald Stromberg as a quest for “redemption by war.”<sup>57</sup> This trend consisted of greeting the outbreak of World War I with enthusiasm, hoping that it would bring resurrection, purification, and liberation to an intellectual community that sensed a loss of feeling, community, and clear direction. Although this trend was universal, it was particularly common among German intellectuals who, as Martha Hanna shows, believed that the war “would usher in a new age for the nation, an age that, free of politics and internal division, would be capable of producing genuine social cohesion.”<sup>58</sup> Liberals, socialists, humanists, and cosmopolitans shared with nationalists the feeling that Europe was entangled not only in political but also in intellectual deadlock, and the war was expected to break the impasse, construct a new world in which one side would win and another lose, and enable Europe to follow a clear path again.

Thomas Mann was accused of being one of those intellectuals because of his expectation during the war that the German soul would emerge strong, proud, free, and happy, and because of his idealization of Joachim, Hans Castorp's soldier brother, who is indeed the only positive figure in *The Magic Mountain*. This idealization can be found in the novel; Mann's description of soldiers in war is, in fact, quite romantic ("Ah, this young blood, with its knapsacks and bayonets, its mud-befouled boots and clothing!").<sup>59</sup> But the accusation seems less justified when we consider Hans Castorp's private sphere.

There has always been a great difference between the discourse on war in the public and private spheres. It is one thing to support war and another to send one's own child to fight in it. In this novel, the readers are led in the cruelest manner through both levels of discourse. War may be the majestic solution to the political deadlock in Europe, but we also follow Hans Castorp, so familiar to us by now, when sent, in the last pages of the novel, to fight in the wars of Europe. Here, the meeting between public and private becomes unbearable, as it does for every individual and family having ever had to experience war, however just that war may have seemed in the public discourse. Hans Castorp, disappointed by all political ideas of the modern era, goes out to fight in a redeeming war, but, as in war, he vanishes out of sight in the tumult, rain, and dusk, and we are given no guarantee of his safe return.

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