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G. S. Couse

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HISTORICISM AND MONARCHISM IN THE THOUGHT OF CHARLES MAURRAS

G. S. COUSE
Carleton University

THE QUESTION of the relation between history and politics in the thought of Charles Maurras takes its precise form from the circumstance that Maurras was more a man of politics than an historian. It is true that he published a few works bearing historical titles¹ and that frequent references to history appeared in his other writings. But Maurras distinguished himself above all as leading theorist of the political movement known as the Action Française. His approach to history was clearly governed by the requirements of monarchist apologetics. The question is concerned, therefore, primarily with the place of history in the political philosophy of Maurras, and only incidentally with the effect of political preconceptions upon his account of the past.

Because of further circumstances, a problem of classification also arises. Maurras was a zealous advocate of classicism in the arts. And, although he adhered to the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, he made liberal use of Aristotelian concepts. Yet, in taking history as seriously as he did, he appears to have been infected by an intellectual habit that is peculiar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is appropriate, then, to consider whether the demands that he made upon history in the name of political philosophy were in reality those of a classicist or an historicist.

To speak of Maurras as having a political philosophy is somewhat misleading. When he died in 1952 he had spent more than half a century as a publicist. The many political writings that he had scattered along the course of these years were of a decidedly polemic quality. Taken separately, they rest often upon unacknowledged assumptions. Taken together, they betray internal contradictions. Yet it is possible, without being unduly Procrustean, to fit them together and represent them as an intellectual system.

The central argument of the political doctrine in question can be stated in a simple syllogism. The first principle of French politics, according to Maurras, ought to be the security of the French nation. The only type of regime that is compatible with this security is the traditional French monarchy. The traditional French monarchy, therefore, ought to be restored.

To establish his major premise — the assertion that national self-preservation ought to be the primary end of French politics — Maurras relies primarily upon non-historical arguments. As a positivist, he denies the validity of all theological or metaphysical systems

¹For example, Charles Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger* 1895-1905: *La république française devant l'Europe* (2d ed.; Paris, 1916); *Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas: Chronique d'une renaissance*, 1895-1905 (Paris, 1916); *Réflexions sur la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1948).

of truth and morality. Yet Maurras recognizes the practical necessity of some principle according to which human action may be ordered. With Comte, therefore, he makes humanity his supreme being, in place of God, and locates the supreme end of man in the fulfilment of human existence. This human existence Maurras conceives of in Aristotelian terms. Man is a rational animal and, by consequence, a social and political being. Only in society is he able to sustain himself as an animal and to attain the civilized level of existence that is open to him as a rational being. Society, then, is necessary to human existence.² But, for the purposes of political debate, Maurras identifies society with one of its modes, the nation. The primary concern of the state, accordingly, is to maintain the existence of the nation that it represents and thus to provide the necessary conditions for man's existence as a rational animal.³

It is only at the point where he identifies human society with the nation that Maurras is obliged to buttress his major premise with arguments from history. Humanity itself, he observes, has never existed in reality: its concrete manifestation occurs in the form of distinct communities. Accordingly, "sane politics subserves the interest of the real political community which is the most *extended* and the most *durable*"⁴ The type of community that meets these qualifications varies historically. To-day it happens to be the nation.⁵ As for the future, there is no evidence to confirm the belief of liberal progressivists and Marxists that human affairs are evolving toward a supra-national organization and peace. Communism has not succeeded in being supra-national. In Russia it has evolved continually toward the restoration of the nation and military.⁶ Nor is militarism declining in the world at large. And history disproves the assumption upon which the progressivist and Marxist dream of peace is based — the assumption that war is due solely to economic, and therefore transitory, contradictions. Thus, in placing the existence of the nation at the summit of practical political ends, Maurras is asserting a positivist respect for what he calls "les données d'histoire."⁷

It is in defence of his minor premise — the exclusive compatibility between French security and French monarchy — that Maurras is especially concerned to draw upon the arsenal of historical experience. The historical case for monarchy, in his opinion, can be extended beyond the question of national security. It can be demonstrated that the inception of democratic government in France has entailed a distinct decline in the nation's economic, moral, artistic, and intellectual vitality. But such a demonstration may be beyond the grasp of unsophisticated minds. Maurras proposes, therefore, to argue

²Maurras, *Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas*, pp. 172-73; *Mes idées politiques* (Paris, 1937), pp. xxiv, 22, 72-74; *L'ordre et le désordre: Les "idées positives" et la Révolution* (Paris, 1948), p. 23.

³Maurras, *La politique religieuse* (Paris, 1919), pp. 76-77; *Mes idées politiques*, pp. 254-55.

⁴Maurras, *L'ordre et le désordre*, p. 10.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 10.

⁷Maurras, *La politique religieuse*, pp. 11, 44.

within the realm of the incontestable and the uncontested.⁸ Accordingly, his momentous work of 1900, the *Enquête sur la Monarchie*, poses the crucial question: "Yes or no, the institution of a traditional Monarchy, hereditary, anti-parliamentary, and decentralized, is it in the interest of public safety?"⁹ In this and subsequent writings he proceeds to examine the record of successive French regimes with respect to their maintenance of the public safety.

In Maurras's view, the monarchs of the Old Regime maintained the public safety with unquestionable effectiveness. Supported by the Church, they saved France from Scandinavian inundation and feudal anarchy. They united her disparate elements into a nation and extended her frontiers steadily. Yet they were not imprudently expansive. Their territorial objectives were limited; and they employed small professional armies, which observed the limiting rules of civilized warfare. Thus they avoided conflicts of such magnitude and ferocity as to place a heavy strain upon the nation's resources and to invite disaster in the event of defeat. On the other hand, they maintained sufficient armed strength to discourage attacks from without.

Maurras is undaunted by the patent weaknesses in the record of the Old Regime. He acknowledges that the public safety was in jeopardy during the Hundred Years' War, and the Wars of Religion, and the Fronde. But each of these crises, he points out, occurred after a diminution of the crown's authority. France regained her feet with the successive restorations of royal authority in Charles VII, and Henry IV, and Louis XIV.¹⁰ Even Louis XV, the one genuine example of governmental laxity in the dynasty founded by Hugh Capet, had the prudence, despite or thanks to his mistresses, to counter the growing power of Prussia by allying in 1756 with Austria, the traditional foe. France may have suffered losses in the colonial field during his reign, but she remained uninvaded at home and acquired Lorraine and Corsica. As for the reputedly inept Louis XVI, he built up the marine to an equality with that of England; his armies were masterpieces of organization; and his support of the revolting Thirteen Colonies repaired the damage of the Seven Years' War.¹¹ Finally, whatever their variation in quality, every monarch from Hugh Capet on had transmitted his heritage either undiminished or augmented by some province.¹²

For Maurras, 1789 represents a turning point in the fortunes of France. The Revolutionary regime, in the strictly partisan hope of discrediting the crown, imprudently plunged Europe into a conflict of peoples and thus inaugurated the modern era of total war.¹³ The implications for France were not immediately apparent. The Legislative Assembly and the Convention made a good fist of internal organization and experienced some success in the field. But their military

⁸Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie, suivie de Une campagne royaliste au "Figaro" et Si le coup de force est possible* (2d ed.; Paris, 1925), x, xii.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁰Maurras, *L'ordre et le désordre*, p. 49; *Mes idées politiques*, p. 288.

¹¹Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 138; *Enquête*, p. cxxi.

¹²Maurras, *Enquête*, pp. 461-62.

¹³Maurras, *Réflexions*, pp. 52, 117-18.

victories were achieved with the help of secret support from England and of the Austrian and Prussian pre-occupation with Poland. The Revolutionary armies were technically the work of the Old Regime, moreover, and it was the royal cultivation since 1648 of demi-protectorates on the eastern border and of division within Germany that enabled the occupation of the Rhineland.¹⁴

The imprudence of Revolutionary militarism bore its appropriate fruit in the Napoleonic era. Napoleon Bonaparte did prove capable of making treaties of peace. But these were precarious arrangements within a policy of constant aggrandizement, a policy that finally brought disaster upon France. She lost her maritime power at Trafalgar and her continental power at Waterloo. Napoleon left her territorially smaller than he had found her. By starting Italy and Germany on the road to unification, he endangered the future security of France. Finally, France's traditional adversary, England, had gained compensation for the loss of the Thirteen Colonies. In fighting the Revolution, after the initial policy of encouragement boomeranged, she laid the foundations of her nineteenth-century grandeur. Malta had been surrendered to her. Gibraltar had not even been attacked. Her maritime supremacy was secure.

Under the Bourbon Restoration and the July Monarchy, French policy resumed the tradition of relying on small armies and avoiding major wars. Once again, caution did not mean a neglect of arms. The marine was rebuilt by 1830; the army was made more efficient by the reorganizing law of 1832; and Algeria was conquered. Against the objection that this was a period of parliamentary monarchy, Maurras insists that Louis XVIII, Charles X, and Louis Philippe were all determined to rule rather than to reign, and that they enjoyed considerable success herein through the respective ministerial dictatorship of the Duc de Richelieu, the Comte de Villèle, and François Guizot.¹⁵ Whatever their success in the constitutional struggle, it was the kings who were responsible for the policy of peace with strength and the champions of parliamentary supremacy who opposed it.¹⁶ Thanks to the crown, France had come to enjoy a "magnificent situation" in Europe when the Revolution of 1848 placed her fortunes once more in republican and then Bonapartist hands.

The Second Empire managed to dissipate the capital accumulated by the restored Bourbons and the July Monarchy. Louis Napoleon sought to revive the glories of the First Empire by adventures in Crimea, Italy, and Mexico. What victories he experienced owed much to the excellence of an army organized under Louis Philippe and trained by the Algerian expeditions. This army the Emperor allowed to deteriorate while France prospered under the precarious security provided by Prussia's involvement in German politics. When Prussia finally turned her attention to France, the Emperor sought to rearm. But the republican opposition, upon which he had become dependent,

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 111-23.

¹⁵Maurras, *Enquête*, p. 456.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. cxxxiii, 496.

refused the necessary funds. The Franco-Prussian War, consequently, rendered fruitless the glorious effort of earlier campaigns. Louis Napoleon also left France smaller than he had found her.¹⁷

The ensuing Third Republic was frightened by Prussia's victory into abandoning the republican tradition of bellicosity and swinging to the opposite extreme — that of abject pacifism. Its foreign policy alternated between inertia and attempts to use the support of one of its two major adversaries, Germany and England, against the other. But the army that was necessary to make of France an equal partner or an effective opponent of Germany, and the marine that was necessary to give her a strong hand with or against England, were both neglected. Between 1900 and 1911 defense estimates presented by the army and navy were continually pared down, notwithstanding the knowledge of heavy German expenditures on arms and the availability of funds for increasing domestic budgets, which shot up remarkably in election years.¹⁸ The Republic naturally became the tool of its allies and suffered the reverses of Fashoda, Tangier, and Agadir. The cession of a large part of French Equatorial Africa to Germany in 1911 inspired a reaction, the experiment in Republican nationalism begun by Raymond Poincaré in the following year. By 1913, however, the opposition to armaments had recovered strength, and in 1914 the Republic's subjection to foreign initiative in its external relations remained intact.¹⁹

The War of 1914 was won in spite of the Republic. Notwithstanding the heroism of the French nation, the victory would have been impossible without external aid. None of France's allies, excepting Russia, joined her as a result of diplomatic foresight on the part of the Republic: they entered the war only when their vital interests were threatened by Germany. It was because of the Republic's Russian alliance, on the other hand, that France was attacked and forced to fight without being able to choose an advantageous time. Even the ghost of the French monarchy had a hand in the victory. It was Louis Philippe who had won the abiding friendship of Belgium. It was Louis XVI who had left a legacy of gratitude toward France in the United States. It was Louis XIV who had had the foresight to rob Austria of a potential ally against France by placing a prince of his own blood on the Spanish throne.²⁰

The Republican peace was a capitulation to the utopian schemes of the United States and England. Having deliberately neglected France's intelligence service, the French government was ignorant of the thoroughness of Germany's defeat and demanded only half of what Germany was ready to accept. Friendship from the conquered country was impossible, yet she was left intact. Friendship from Italy was possible, yet she was alienated. France's interest in a strong Austria to counter Germany was not upheld. In place of these obvious conditions of national security, the Republic relied

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. xxxiii; 376, n. 1; 409, n. 2; 461.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. xxi-xxii.

¹⁹Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger*, pp. lv, 192.

²⁰Maurras, *Enquête*, pp. xlviii-li.

upon the foreseeably mistaken hope of a system of English and American guarantees.²¹

After Versailles the Republic continued in its subjection to foreign influences. At the Washington Conference of 1921 it bowed to terms that meant the end of a French naval renaissance. The Ruhr invasion of 1923 was carried out by Poincaré with a fatal lack of determination. Upon the termination in 1924 of the second Poincaré experiment in Republican nationalism, the undiluted neglect of national security was resumed. The leaders of the Republic, ignoring the shortcomings of the Locarno guarantees of 1925 and the ineffectiveness of the limitations that had been placed upon German armaments, were confident that the age of peace had come.²² When the time of disillusionment arrived, France had again become the docile partner of an entente with England. France was impelled, unprepared and in no position to help Poland, to serve the intrigues of Winston Churchill in England's war against Hitler. Then in May 1940, at English insistence and without sufficient military aid to make a success of the manoeuvre, the best of the French troops were sent beyond the fortified Belgian frontier, to be eventually deprived of all their equipment and part of their personnel before withdrawing at Dunkirk. This decision was the initial step in the fall of France.²³

As Maurras presents it, then, the verdict of history is clear. France has been invaded six times since 1789. "Such as it is, even in periods when the regime is inculpated with deviations, royalty has made and conserved France, France has always declined without royalty."²⁴

Even if Maurras's conclusion about the historical record is accepted as incontestable, it does not suffice alone to establish the minor premise of his central argument. To say that monarchy has been exclusively compatible with national security in the past is not to say that it will be so in the future. As Maurras implicitly recognizes, he must show that the historical coincidence of monarchy and national security is necessary and, therefore, immutable.

Maurras gives his account of French history an air of necessity by interjecting explanatory generalizations upon the nature of political institutions. Together, these generalizations constitute a catalogue of the virtues that have been commonly attributed to monarchy in the French tradition. Non-parliamentary monarchy, for example, he extols as being alone capable of adequate boldness and consistency in forming policy, of adequate rapidity and secrecy in conducting diplomacy or war.²⁵ Only the hereditary ruler, furthermore, is likely to come to office with the benefit of an appropriate political education.²⁶ And only in a decentralized state does patriotism rest on the one

²¹Maurras, *Le mauvais traité de la victoire à Locarno: Chronique d'une décadence* (Paris 1928), I, 67.

²²Maurras, *La seule France: Chronique des jours d'épreuve* (Lyon, 1941), p. 52.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 70, 114, 137-39.

²⁴Maurras, *Enquête*, p. 8.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. lxviii, lxxxi-lxxxii, 511.

genuine foundation of local interests and allegiances.²⁷ It is because of such inherent advantages that French monarchy has upheld the public safety so well.

Up to a point, Maurras supports his explanatory generalizations themselves by reference to historical experience. For example, the popular outcry against Louis XV's alliance with Austria is cited to demonstrate the unreliability of public opinion.²⁸ The careers of men like Alexander the Great serve to show that hereditary access to office has the advantage of bringing forth leaders in the full vigour of youth.²⁹ And French history since 1789 is presumed to confirm the contention that democracy is incapable of decentralizing authority.³⁰ But Maurras uses such historical observations only to complement essentially non-historical arguments. At this level, his generalizations are based more on what might be called common experience than on experience derived from a systematic consultation of history.

To explain the historical concurrence of monarchy and national security, Maurras does not limit himself to generalizations upon the relative structural efficiency of various forms of government. Historical events are especially amenable to explanation, in his opinion, because man is the subject as well as object of historical knowledge. Maurras is undisturbed by the anti-positivist objection that man, as subject of historical knowledge, is altered by what he learns of himself through consulting the past and, consequently, that human affairs are not governed by immutable laws such as prevail in the natural order. For him, the identity of subject and object actually confirms history's reliability as the laboratory of political science.

For if it is true that political experiment, in the strict sense, is pure historical observation and is not subject to experiment properly speaking, . . . it is true also that a large and clear experience of the past sheds upon the political theorist a ray of light with whose equivalent the chemist is not acquainted and which the physicist has to suppose and calculate. The political theorist observes the succession and connection of facts. But, on the other hand, what he knows of man permits him to seize also what it is that engenders these events: the internal play of human passions, ideas, interests appear to him pure and naked, in such a way that his observation does not stop at the signs, at the phenomena, it grasps their *raison d'être*, their generators.³¹

Thus the political theorist is enabled by a prior knowledge of the workings of the human reason and will to make generalizations from historical experience that are even more necessary than the laws discovered by the natural scientist.

A knowledge of the play of human ideas and passions reveals, for example, the necessity of the course of the French Revolution. Between 1789 and 1815 France progressed, contrary to the intentions of the revolutionaries, from an insurrection of the individual to a

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. xciv-xcvii; Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger*, pp. xxix, xxxiii.

²⁷Maurras, *L'Anglais qui a connu la France* (Paris, 1928), pp. 37-38.

²⁸Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 138.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. xlii.

³⁰Maurras, *L'ordre et le désordre*, pp. 53-56; *Enquête*, pp. 197-98, 230-31; 335, n. 1; 450.

³¹Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 103.

tyranny of the state. It did so in part by logical necessity. Since the democratic state is theoretically an emanation of individual, sovereign wills, it claims the whole majesty and force of these wills. Being logically unable to tolerate intermediary groups between the individual and itself, it eliminates them and holds at its mercy persons and goods.³² The progression was necessitated also by the fact of human cupidity. "In the immense majority of beings, personal interest is the nerve of private action."³³ The great majority of Frenchmen were incapable of the disinterested patriotism that was essential to Rousseau's understanding of freedom. The Jacobin of 1793 was obliged, therefore, to say:

—Death to the savage enemies of liberty! Let the State exterminate them to the last, and the tree of liberty will produce everywhere its flowers and fruits.

The Cesarist, the statist of 1789 [*sic*] had then to conclude:—The enemies of liberty are immortal and inextinguishable, but let us constitute in the State a defender, a policeman and a guardian equally perpetual.³⁴

Finally, a supposedly overwhelming force of human cupidity is essential to Maurras's explanation of the failure of democratic regimes to uphold the public safety. This failure has not been due simply to the inefficiencies of the democratic machinery of government. It has been due also to an inevitable domination of democratic government by men who have no intention of making the machinery of government work in the public interest. Like all other human beings, the hereditary monarch is selfishly inclined. It is in his personal interest to retain his office and have his family succeed him. But, if he is reckless with the public trust, he is in danger of being dethroned and subjected, with his family, to the misery of exile. His personal interest, therefore, is clearly identical with the public interest.³⁵ The elected politician, by contrast, has little to fear in abusing the public trust: at most, he may lose his office, and even that can be regained easily. In a democracy, moreover, the all-important support of public opinion can be bought by the politician. For public opinion is controlled by a few journalists and orators who themselves are likely to be governed by self-interest. Thus the door to power is left open for those who would pillage the state or subvert it from without.³⁶

Maurras's historical case for monarchy, then, rests on the assumption that reason and will in man are subject to universal and unbreakable laws. The assumption as it applies to human reason seems to be self-evident to Maurras. As it applies to the human will, it is given some foundation in historical experience. Universal history, as Maurras sees it, shows nowhere a government that has been free of

³²Maurras, *L'ordre et le désordre*, p. 33; *Réflexions*, p. 211.

³³Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 133.

³⁴Maurras, *Réflexions*, p. 178.

³⁵Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, pp. 291-92.

³⁶Maurras, *L'avenir de l'intelligence: Auguste Comte: Le romantisme féminin: Mademoiselle Monk* (new ed.; Paris, 1909), p. 81; *Enquête*, pp. lxxxviii-xc.

the "law of money."³⁷ Notwithstanding modern technological progress, moreover, people still rob, rape, and kill as of old. The customs of men have varied, but "what do we know to have altered in four thousand years that is essential to man?"³⁸ But it remains to be explained by Maurras why the supposed historical constancy of what he conceives to be man's essence should be regarded as necessary. His answer, in effect, is that the underlying immutability of man and his surroundings is self-evident: it cannot be rationally demonstrated. Yet to deny it is to reject one of the primary conditions of human existence. "Thought, art, civilization all begin with an act of faith in the immutable essence of things."³⁹

If the major and minor premises of Maurras's central argument are valid, it follows incontestably that the traditional French monarchy ought to be restored. But two questions remain open. Maurras feels obliged to consider whether a restoration can be brought about and, if so, how.

It has been said, by implication, that Maurras sees the course of French history moving inevitably toward a restoration of monarchy.⁴⁰ The allegation is inaccurate. Maurras repeatedly castigates those, including Auguste Comte himself, who profess to discern an all-embracing law of historical development. He is naturally concerned to combat such systems of history, for most of them relegate monarchy irrevocably to the past. But he is equally critical of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, which could be taken to assure a monarchic restoration. All attempts to reduce history to a single law of development are damned by Maurras. For they defy the evidence of history. They re-introduce theology and metaphysics in disguise.⁴¹ Maurras is understandably opposed, on the other hand, to the anti-positivist contention that all historical events are absolutely original and unique. "They are original, they are unique, but their succession is not."⁴² Certain types of events, in other words, have always accompanied one another. The course of history then is subject to a multiplicity of laws. This multiplicity, in turn, allows for an element of indeterminacy in events. As a classicist, Maurras assigns some historical influence to choice and ingenuity on man's part.⁴³ His laws of history simply govern the results that follow from a society's choice of a particular course of action. They subject the course of history only to a conditional necessity, which leaves the future uncertain. They assure us, that is to say, only that, if this happens, that will happen. They teach us only that, if monarchy is to be restored, certain conditions will have to be fulfilled.⁴⁴

³⁷Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 162.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁹Maurras, *Le chemin de paradis: Contes philosophiques* (6th ed.; Paris, n.d.), p. liv. Cf. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, pp. xci, 36.

⁴⁰Julien Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals (La trahison des clercs)*, trans. Richard Aldington (Boston, 1955), p. 22.

⁴¹Maurras, *Le chemin de paradis*, pp. xlv-xlviii.

⁴²Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, p. 110.

⁴³Maurras, *Enquête*, pp. 414, 495.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 193.

Maurras himself perceives a comprehensive pattern in history, yet one which leaves his uncertainty about the future intact. The ancient Greeks, he asserts, took the first great step in the work of civilizing man. They imposed a qualitative element upon the purely quantitative accumulation of the "barbaric civilizations." They placed reason on their altar and, in doing so, subjected thought, art, and morality to the rule of limits. Their accomplishment was such that it has become *the* tradition, and all progress consists simply in transmitting and developing it.⁴⁵ The duty of its transmission and development has, since the Italian Renaissance, been shouldered mainly by France.⁴⁶ Thus the existence of man as a civilized being has come to be dependent upon the existence of France as the custodian of the classical tradition. But this tradition, which is at one with monarchy and Catholicism in its denial of the sovereignty of the individual,⁴⁷ has been challenged in France since 1789 by the revolutionary tradition. As a good nationalist, Maurras attributes the tares that have grown up in the fields of France to the work of a foreign enemy. The Revolution was a product of both circumstances and ideas. As a product of ideas, its formal cause, in the Aristotelian sense, was the doctrine of Rousseau. But Rousseau was a Swiss. His ideas are traceable through eighteenth-century pantheism and deism to the alien tradition of Protestantism; thence to the Biblical, monotheistic, prophetic, intellectually anarchic religion of Jerusalem; and thence to the barbaric oriental cultures of the ancient world. The conflict between the Old Regime and the Revolution in France is thus a continuation of that between Greeks and barbarians.⁴⁸ The classical tradition, in turn, represents the most perfect real manifestation of man's existence as a rational being. The revolutionary tradition, with its anarchic individualism of thought and action, threatens man's existence both as a rational being and as an animal.⁴⁹ The conflict, then, is one between being and non-being as understood by Maurras, between the God and the Satan of positivism. For Maurras, there can be no certainty that civilization will prevail in the end over barbarism.⁵⁰

As for the necessary conditions of a restoration, Maurras gives first place to the action of an élite. Such spontaneous, creative influence as man has exerted upon the course of history has, without exception, been the work of minorities.⁵¹ The majority of men, as rational beings, are never more than the product of their inheritance and the fortuitous encounters of their life. It is only the few who have gained a certain independence of their milieu who are capable of creative action. The monarchist élite will have to persuade the public to sign the abdication of its fictitious sovereignty. But propaganda

⁴⁵Maurras, *Anthinea: D'Athènes à Florence* (5th ed.; Paris, 1912), pp. 72, 103.

⁴⁶Maurras, *Réflexions*, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁷Maurras, *La politique religieuse*, pp. xli, 67, 386, 394-96.

⁴⁸Maurras, *Enquête*, p. 207.

⁴⁹Maurras, *Réflexions*, pp. 194-95; *La politique religieuse*, p. lv; *Le chemin de paradis*, pp. liii, lvi-lvii.

⁵⁰Maurras, *Le chemin de paradis*, pp. xlvi, li-lii.

⁵¹Maurras, *Enquête*, p. 137, n. 1; *L'avenir de l'intelligence*, pp. 275-85.

will not be sufficient; for the government holds the ballot-boxes, and the possessors of power, being human, will not relinquish it voluntarily. A *coup de force* will be necessary. And once a king is thus placed in power, the allegiance of the public will be quickly won; for, as history shows, the crowd is capricious and always follows energetic minorities. A favourable occasion must be awaited, however. But it is certain that it will come in that several such occasions have arisen since the beginning of the Third Republic. In view of these considerations, Maurras does think a restoration inevitable. But he only believes it: this is avowedly an act of faith.⁵²

Whether Maurras ought to be called an historicist depends upon which of the various connotations of the term one adopts. Historicism in its early nineteenth-century form represents, in part, a reaction in the name of concrete historical realities against the abstract rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment. This reaction found one of its expressions in the scientific mania for deriving generalizations about human society from positive historical facts.⁵³ To this still prevalent mania Maurras is obviously addicted. Yet his denial that any comprehensive law of historical progression has been demonstrated makes him a moderate representative of scientific historicism. Indeed, so far as he treats history simply as a means of extending the political theorist's experience beyond the limits of his own times and, thereby, as an aid in the discovery of general truths about political institutions, Maurras does not differ essentially from the ancients, or from various representatives of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. There are, moreover, other types of historicism than the scientific. The most radical expression of the early historicist reaction against abstract rationalism was opposed also to the universalism of rationalist thought. It sought to replace the universal political norms of the Age of Enlightenment with particular norms — norms that would vary from nation to nation, and from time to time in the course of each nation's development.⁵⁴ Maurras, it is true, regards the perpetuation of the French nation and its supposedly peculiar tradition as the most important practical objective of the state. But he attempts to relate this objective to a universal supreme good — human existence. Particularistic historicism, by contrast, has moved since the early nineteenth century toward an absolute historical relativism. It has come to deny not only that man has a fixed essence but that he can make any universally valid judgments concerning the true, the beautiful, or the good. With this radical historicism Maurras is clearly in disagreement. Absolute relativism, he argues, is logically self-destructive. It is impossible for man to exist, moreover, without absolute convictions.⁵⁵

For all that, Maurras does not fall strictly within the classical tradition in the type of conclusion that he draws from history. One

⁵²Maurras, *Enquête*, pp. 414-15, 484, 501, 541-42, 557, 561.

⁵³F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1952), pp. 64-65, 73-74.

⁵⁴Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 13-16.

⁵⁵Maurras, *Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas*, p. 41; *L'ordre et le désordre*, p. 15; *Anthinea*, pp. 31-32; *Mes idées politiques*, p. 30.

of the distinctive features of classical political philosophy is its moderate flexibility.⁵⁶ Although it assigns fixed ends to the state, it allows for a liberal variation with circumstances in the means to these ends. Maurras does admit that, under certain circumstances, aristocracy may be compatible with the common weal of a people. But no such exception is made in favour of democracy, nor does the exception in favour of aristocracy apply to France.⁵⁷ For the purposes of French politics, then, his means as well as his ends are fixed.

Maurras has made history the servant of an inflexible political doctrine by adding a distinctly modern feature to the classical understanding of human nature. Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal is meant, in one respect, to describe what man is potentially; for, in its fully developed sense, it describes what man is ideally. It acknowledges, conversely, that most men actually fall short of the end of enlightenment and rational self-control that is inherent in the mode of existence by which man differs from mere animals. It allows, particularly in its Christianized version, for substantial variation in the degree to which men, even in the mass, will actually attain this end. Thus understood, the classical definition of man can reasonably be said to describe an immutable essence. Much of Maurras's political theory rests upon this classical, or teleological, conception of man. But the positivist in him, urged on by eagerness to establish an incontestable argument for monarchy, is determined to understand human nature in exclusively empirical terms as well. He goes on to describe man as a being who is subject on the whole to the overwhelming domination of cupidity. In doing so, he brings under the mantle of immutability that is proper to the classical view of man's essence a generalization which, even if its dubious historical credentials are accepted, does not belong there; for this generalization concerns the actual proportion of reason to passion and appetite in human conduct.

Maurras's argument culminates, then, in an unacknowledged dilemma. Reason demands that a choice be made between the classical and the positivist views of human nature. Strict adherence to the former would entail a type of historical relativism that applies to constitutional forms but not to the ends and moral limits of political action. It would entail, in particular, a recognition that intellectual and moral virtue could at times be sufficiently prevalent in a body politic to legitimize at least a qualified form of democratic government. To understand human nature, on the other hand, by reference exclusively to actual human conduct is to adopt one of the cardinal assumptions of absolute historical relativism. For, given this assumption, one need only point out that human conduct does vary substantially in order to establish the conclusion that man has no immutable essence and is subject to no universally binding, natural norms of political action. Either choice would be unacceptable to Maurras. And his failure to make the choice renders his use of history not only difficult to classify but unacceptable to both the classicist and the thoroughgoing historicist.

⁵⁶Strauss, pp. 139-40, 157-64, 190-92.

⁵⁷Maurras, *Réflexions*, pp. 45, 271-72; *Enquête*, pp. 71-72; *Mes idées politiques*, pp. 266-67, 277.