

**LEOPOLD KOHR (1978): *The Breakdown of Nations*, E.P. Dutton, New York. [1st edition, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957]**

*Leopold Kohr, described as a “teasing leprechaun” by his fellow Austrian Ivan Illich, is one of the unknown and unsung men of wisdom of the twentieth century. “The Breakdown of Nations” remains as his enduring legacy to those who would follow. What radiates through this penetrating critique of a cancerous civilisation is the great humanity of one who has seen and understood the ultimate folly of pursuing power, conquest and dominion.*

*Kohr’s prophetic insight is infused with a dark humor that is neither exasperated by, nor admiring of, the political and economic centralisation that has riven the twentieth century. Kohr offers, rather, a laconically compassionate view of human folly. He projects an unnervingly realistic view of the essential fallibility, cynicism and self-interest that drives many of those who would claim their mission as that of rescuing humanity from its own folly.*

*Leopold Kohr projects his enlightened anarchy through the prism of language and metaphor. He thereby describes political realities far more effectively than the endless and wearisome exegetics of academic interpreters of politics and economics.*

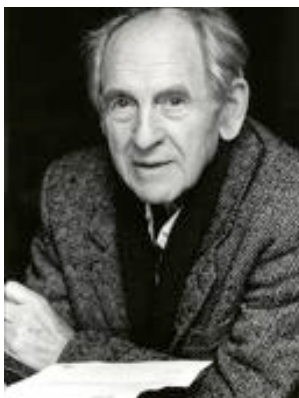
*Although written in 1951, “The Breakdown of Nations” has diagnosed the essential pathology of the twentieth century, even before it developed into the universally sanctioned policies of globalisation that now manifest in the cultural, economic and military Americanisation of the world.*

*Although the outlaw wisdom of Leopold Kohr may have by-passed those theatres of power intent on the hegemonic domination of nations and of thought that presently seek to control the fate of the world, it continues to inspire and inform those who would strive for a future grounded in sustainable human and universal values.*

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**Foreword  
by Kirkpatrick Sale**



It is only in small states, Kohr suggests, that there can be true democracy, because it is only there that the citizen can have some direct influence over the governing institutions; only there that economic problems become tractable and controllable, and economic lives become more rational; only there that culture can flourish without the diversion of money and energy into statist pomp and military adventure; only there that the individual in all dimensions can flourish free of systematic social and governmental pressures.

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## Introduction

As the physicists of our time have tried to elaborate an integrated single theory, capable of explaining not only some but all phenomena of the *physical* universe, so I have tried on a different plane to develop a single theory through which not only some but all phenomena of the *social* universe can be reduced to a common denominator. The result is a new and unified political philosophy centering in the *theory of size*. It suggests that there seems only one cause behind all forms of social misery: *bigness*. . .



Wherever something is wrong, something is too big. If the stars in the sky or the atoms of uranium disintegrate in spontaneous explosion, it is not because their substance has lost its balance. It is because matter has attempted to expand beyond the impassable barriers set to every accumulation. Their mass has become too big. If the human body becomes diseased, it is, as in cancer, because a cell, or group of cells, has begun to outgrow its allotted narrow limits. And if

the body of a people becomes diseased with the fever of aggression, brutality, collectivism, or massive idiocy, it is not because it has fallen victim to bad leadership or mental derangement. It is because human beings, so charming as individuals or in small aggregations, have been welded into over-concentrated social units such as mobs, unions, cartels, or great powers. That is when they begin to slide into uncontrollable catastrophe. p xviii

The solution of the problems confronting the world as a whole does not seem to lie in the creation of still bigger social units and still vaster governments whose formation is now attempted with such unimaginative fanaticism by our statesmen. It seems to lie in the elimination of those overgrown organisms that go by the name of great powers, and in the restoration of a healthy system of small and easily manageable states such as characterized earlier ages. p xix

## Chapter One: THE PHILOSOPHIES OF MISERY

In a period of widespread tyranny, brutality, almost perpetual warfare, and other related miseries, it seems legitimate to ask by what means a more peaceful and socially satisfactory existence might be secured. p 1

The Ancients, attributing the cause of most difficulties to the wrath of the gods, thought that the simplest way of improving their condition was to resort to prayer or, if this should prove insufficient, to the sacrificial slaughter of the persons who had antagonized the gods. Sometimes, the results were stunning. . . .

In the Middle Ages, the divine theory was supplemented by a *witch theory of social misery* which attributed the cause of afflictions less to the wrath of God than to the

malevolence of an evil spirit. Quite logically, the principal cure was now thought to lie in the elimination of the objects which seemed possessed by the devil. So up in flames went a behexed barn, a cross-eyed hunchback, a very ugly woman, or a very beautiful one. Again, the results were considered highly satisfactory except in a few cases when, instead of suspecting their theory, people suspected they had burned the wrong witch, and so began the merry chase anew.

Later, with man's growing interest in the mechanism of the universe, a bundle of *cosmic theories of misery* began to enjoy wide currency. Disease and wars were now attributed to the occasional appearance of a comet, the more frequent appearance of a red corona around the moon or, when it was discovered that sunspots had an irritating effect on our nervous system, to the cyclical intensification of sunspot activities. Like all the earlier theories, these too were considered eminently satisfactory, as there was rarely a misfortune that did not coincide with one or more of the celestial phenomena. Since nothing could be done about the latter, the cosmic theories had, in addition, the advantage of relieving mankind of the difficult task of seeking solutions and cures. . .

With the advent of modern times we find a new string of theories of social misery. In rapid succession there developed an *economic theory*, attributing war and other forms of social evil to the expansive urge of profit-seeking capitalism; a *psychological theory*, attributing them to frustration; a *personal, ideological, cultural*, and a *national theory*, attributing them in turn to the design of evil men such as Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin; to evil ideologies such as nazism or communism; to evil cultural traditions such as Prussian militarism or British colonialism; and finally, because a majority of these features seemed occasionally to coincide in the history of a particular people, to an evil inheritance, an evil nation such as the Germans as they appeared to the eyes of the Western Allies in the past, or the Americans as they appear to the eyes of the Eastern Allies now.

pp 2-3

As things stand, Western or not, peace-loving or not, the cultural productions of most creative peoples seem to follow almost identical channels. Their differences are but differences of language, not of substance. If the Germans have the *Nibelungenlied* which glorifies physical prowess and military exploit, the French have the *Song of Roland*, the English *Beowulf*, the Romans the *Aeneid*, the Greeks the matchless *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, all praising the same qualities with equal fervour. If Goethe's *Faust* is full of the devil and hell, so is Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, to say nothing of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which deals not with one but seven hells, and whose poetic presentation of horror exceeds even the imaginative splendour of American funnies.

p 7

The hallmark of *Western* civilization is not that it is the civilization of the West, as is frequently believed, but that it is based on the philosophy of individualism which, again, does not concern itself with love of peace or *social* happiness, but with love of *personal* freedom and *personal* accomplishment. It would therefore have been less confusing if scholars, instead of using the term *West*, had talked of the civilization of the *Occident*, the Spenglerian *Abendland*, whose common denominator has always been individualism, in contrast to that of the *Orient*, the *Morgenland*, whose basis has always been collectivism. Though these designations have likewise a faintly

geographic origin, they refer more clearly than the others to cultures, not to regions; to ideas, not to nations. pp 8-9



As Western civilization could not be conceived without the personal genius of Shakespeare, Voltaire, Rembrandt, Dante, or Socrates - men from the South and West of Europe - so it could no longer be conceived without the personal contributions of such Easterners as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Tschaikevsky, or of such Germans as Beethoven, Kant, Goethe, Heine, or Durer. Theirs was not a retarded civilization. Nor was it a civilization different from that of France or England, which could have given a satisfactory cultural explanation for the rise of Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini. Like that of other members of the

Western family, theirs was a civilization created by persons fulfilling the purpose of their *individual* existence, not by communities or peoples joining in *collective* effort to reach a collectivized end. . . .

The productions of the various cultural realms are not only too alike in what they praise and what they condemn; most of the recent aggressors in war and perpetrators of atrocities such as the Italians, Germans, and Russians were, moreover, not alien to Western civilization but ranked, like those we consider virtuous lovers of peace, amongst its most outstanding members and contributors. p 9

Compared with the barbaric exploits of the civilized, the savageries of the barbarians seem to lose all significance. And as to wars, almost the only peoples refraining from this primitive form of social activity at the present time are not the most advanced but the most backward ones. In view of all this, it may safely be stated that the cultural theory of social misery, which to this day enjoys illustrious support, which served as the basis of many expurgation and re-education policies, and has led to such hopeful creations as UNESCO, sheds little light on the complex problems it set out to solve; and that the spread of civilization, be it of East or West, of Greeks or Anglo-Saxons, may contribute to poetry and knowledge, but hardly to social happiness and peace. pp 14-15

The atmosphere of perpetual frustration resulting from the inactive drag and the inconclusiveness of interminable fighting seems at a given point to lead to the spontaneous creation of the idea that the principal cause of mankind's misery is not just the leadership, the philosophy, or the culture of the enemy. It is his very race. A closer look now reveals quite distinctly that he is *born* to mischief. From his very childhood he is observed to display a degree of ferocity and love of aggressiveness unmatched elsewhere. A re-reading of history seems suddenly to make it clear that the current enemy is actually the historic enemy. And the longer the war lasts, the worse he begins to look. In the end, not only propagandists but even scholars begin to furnish evidence of his *collective* perfidy, lawyers to establish his *collective* guilt, and statesmen to think that, in the interests of a peace-loving humanity, his continued survival can no longer be tolerated. When this stage is reached, the solution of most problems afflicting society appears quite simple. It would be useless to re-educate the vanquished. He must be eliminated. Carthage must be destroyed. p 15



Whether peace-loving or aggressive, in one feature nearly all nations are alike. Nearly all have chosen as the animal most representative of their soul a *beast of prey*, indicating that they consider it more appropriate to be symbolized by barbaric ferociousness than by civilized beatitude. Italy prefers the voracious wolf to the loyal dog. England and Prussia the growling lion to the sweetly purring cat. Russia the plump, tactless, but powerful bear to the swift and elegant prairie horse. The Habsburg Monarchy, one of the more civilized institutions of history, not satisfied with a one-headed eagle, chose one with two heads to make it wilder still. Others cherished panthers, hawks, snakes, or even dragons. The United States could have been symbolized by the lark, that enchanting bird, ever singing and ever in pursuit of happiness. But it chose the bald eagle. The only exception, or nearly so, is represented by France which, also not quite without significance, chose the ever-amorous cock. But even here the choice may have been due to the fact that the cock's amorous pursuits force him to be a perpetual fighter on the side. pp 17-18

The role of chief aggressor is a relative one. Instead of being held by a single people, it has rotated with great fluidity amongst the various nations. Sometimes it was held by the Athenians, Spartans, or Macedonians; sometimes by the Dutch, Danes, or Portuguese; sometimes by the French and English; sometimes, and more recently, by the Germans and Russians; and, unless a different definition applies to us than to other men, at some time it will in all likelihood be held by the Americans. In the eyes of our former Russian comrades in arms, who now call us anything from *Anglo-American cannibals* to *atomshiks*, we may, in fact, hold it already. p 22

The national theory proved no more helpful in the search for the primary cause of social misery than any of the others discussed so far. All it revealed was that biologically as well as historically one people is just as good or bad as the other. Instead of uncovering meaningful differences amongst nations, it merely confirmed Cicero's concept of the similarity of human nature. And not only Cicero's but even God's who, contemplating His creation, came to the sorrowful conclusion that, irrespective of upbringing or nationality, "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis, vi, 5). Which means, that the proposal of the national theory to cure the world's misery by eliminating the evil-doing nation would lead us nowhere. For the moment one evildoer disappears, the vacancy, as post-World-War-II developments have amply shown, will promptly be filled from the unsuspected but ever willing ranks of the previous defenders of better causes. pp 23-24

## **Chapter Two: THE POWER THEORY OF AGGRESSION**

Most nations, irrespective of their racial background, the stage of their civilization, their ideology, or their economic system, have managed to roll up an impressively similar record. Mass executions and related monstrosities were perpetrated in Germany under the Nazis, in India under the British, in France under the Catholics, in



Russia under some of the most savage, and in Italy under some of the most enlightened, princes. There could not have been a vaster difference of conditions. Yet, if similar excesses occurred everywhere and in all phases and periods of historic development, there must apparently be a common element transcending these differences. This common denominator, as we shall see, seems to be the simple ability, the power, to commit monstrosities. As a result, we arrive at what we might call a *power theory of social misery*. pp 25-26



As long as the victims of persecution are few, the method of execution or, to use a Marxian term, the *mode of production*, will consist in ceremonial knifings, hangings, or shootings, preceded by a semblance of legal process and followed by a semblance of civilized burial. The executioners, moreover, still not quite sure as to the sufficiency of their power and still feeling their wrong because of the singularity of their acts, will have an urge to apologize. But as the number of their victims increases, the time for apologies and even for indulging in guilt feelings

begins to dwindle, and individual executions or burials not only become cumbersome but technically unfeasible. So new practices have to be initiated. Now the victims are led to wells, trenches, or rivers, executed on the spot, and then simply thrown in. This represents less an increase in viciousness than an adjustment to the requirements of new situations which could not be handled with previous means. Hence the spectacle in past or present of corpse-filled trenches in France, Germany, Russia, Korea, of wherever else the commission of mass slaughter demanded mass disposition of bodies. . . .

Finally, when this, too, becomes impossible, the situation demands the last in the heretofore known modes of production - burning. With other methods falling short of the requirements of the task, the victims are now simply herded together, placed in a building, and set afire either *with* the building as in the mill at Carmes, where the techniques of mass cremation were as yet undeveloped, or *without* the building as in the modern crematoria of the Nazis. In the future, use will undoubtedly be made of atomic power, which not only suggests itself as the only efficient means of coping with the number of victims made available by our overpopulated modern mass societies, but is also by far the cheapest means of performing what is expected of it. pp 30-31

When misbehaviour reaches the stage of mass perpetration, such general numbness and sophistication may set in that murderers lose all their sense of criminality, and onlookers all their sense of crime.

This is when the perpetrators begin to show a craftsman's pride in their accomplishments, express satisfaction for jobs well done, and expect promotions instead of punishment for duties meticulously performed. The bystanders, on the other hand, now begin to treat massacres as if they were holidays and, with the detachment that goes with disindividualized great numbers, to detect the scientific and

commercial potentialities of the condition. Doctors suddenly see that the dying can be used for medical experiments; matrons, that tattooed skins look nice on lampshades; apothecaries that human fat lends itself to the production of medicinal substances; and agriculturalists, that crushed bones furnish excellent fertilizers. pp 31-32

The Germans of the Reich itself, stripped of all power as they were after World War II, threatened to become again as peaceful in the nineteen-fifties as the Anhalters were a hundred years ago. Hence the extraordinary string of socialist election victories which were so puzzling to so many of our commentators who were unable to understand how a party in a *war-loving* country could win on an almost cantankerously anti-militarist platform. Clearly, deprived of power, even the aggressive Germans see no charm in a military destiny just as, endowed with power, even the saintly Indians have demonstrated in their bullying campaigns against Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Nepal, that they are not averse to the pleasures of warfare. Only in the face of the seemingly almighty Chinese and Russians do the disciples of Gandhi practise what they preach - love of peace. . . .

The objective fact of physical power alone is not all that is needed in order to cause its eruption into war. It must be coupled with the *belief* that the critical volume of strength has been reached, for, without such conviction, even the greatest power is no power while, with it, even inferior strength may provide the impetus of aggression. p 37

Having at last discovered that the present war danger no longer emanates from the Germans to whose doorsteps they have traced them until so recently, they are now ascribing it to the Russians, and in particular to the depraved ambition and state of mind of an obstinately wicked group of communist leaders. . . . Russia would follow the same policy of aggression if she were led by a group of saints, just as Germany was driven on the path of aggression not only by Hitler but also by Emperor Wilhelm who, unlike the uncouth and blasphemous Fuhrer, was, if not exactly a saint, at least a devout believer and the head of his country's Protestant church. Russia, in her present power-breeding size, would be a danger to world peace even in the hands of an American proconsul, as ancient Gaul was a threat to Rome in the hands of anybody, particularly in the masterful hands of Rome's own generals. . . .

If the Russian leaders act as they do, it is not because they are bad, nor because they are communists, nor because they are Russians. They act aggressively because they have emerged from World War II with such a formidable degree of social power that they think they cannot be checked by any possible combination confronting them, or that there will be a time in the near future when they can no longer be checked. Wherever and whenever they had this conviction in the recent past, they attacked, invaded, and made war. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and the other satellites are all monuments to Russian *power*. pp 42-43

As an overdose of poison is safe in nobody's system, however sound and healthy he may be, so power is safe in nobody's hands, not even in those of a police force charged with the task of averting aggression. p 45



Though the theory submitted here represents a materialistic interpretation, it is thus neither amoral nor atheistic. Nor is it Marxian. According to Marx, the primary cause explaining both historic change and, along with it, our changing actions, attitudes, and institutions, is our *changing mode of production*. According to the theory underlying the analysis of this book, it is the *changing size of society*. If Marx's theory represents mainly an economic interpretation, the theory of this book represents mainly a social or, because of its emphasis on physical magnitudes, a physical, or socio-physical, interpretation of history. It tries to fill the gaps left open by the Marxian approach. This does not mean that the Marxian interpretation cannot explain a great deal. It does. In fact, it is one

of the most lucid tools of understanding ever to be developed. But there are fundamental areas in which it fails.

p 47

A leisurely way of life with its accompanying religiosity, its amiable courtesies, its respect for accomplishment and hierarchy, its concept of the just price, the fair wage, the sinfulness of interest, and lastly its unhurried method of gaining the means of its subsistence, are all characteristic reflexes not so much of economic activities as of life in *small* communities. Conversely, ideals such as equality, uniformity, socialism, easy divorce, which the Marxian interpretation attributes to the leveling effect of mass production and the interchangeability of human beings manipulating machines, can be much more easily understood if we think of them, along with the mass mode of production itself, as the consequence of the requirements of life in *large* societies and the levelling effect of *great* multitudes. Reaching the limit at which growing societies can no longer satisfy their needs by hand production, they automatically produce the equalizing, materialistic, semi-pagan, inventive climate of which the machine mode of production is not cause but consequence. . . .

As the preceding chapters have shown with regard to certain social miseries and philosophies, and as the following chapters will make increasingly clear with regard to a number of other areas of economic, cultural, political, and philosophic attitudes of good as well as of evil impact, the primary cause influencing human history and action will, in the ultimate analysis, nearly always appear to be the size of the group within which we live. Because Marx ignored this, his otherwise so brilliantly reasoned analysis led to those puzzling miscalculations which his opponents never tire of emphasizing (while at the same time only rarely giving evidence of grasping the connection themselves).

pp 48-49

It is because of his inability to do harm, not because of superior virtue, that the capitalist profit seeker will paradoxically behave as if *guided by an invisible hand* to serve society well. Since bad service would not yield profit, he becomes altruistic out of sheer egoism. But whenever he finds the opportunity of getting away with conspiracy against his fellow men, he will grasp it with relish, as has been shown by those who have succeeded in becoming monopolists. As a result of the large size of



their business units, they alone in a competitive capitalist society have the power to misbehave with impunity, and promptly do so until checked by another power, the power of government drawing from still larger size. p 50

No ideology of peace, however strongly entrenched it may be in a country's traditions, can prevent war if a certain power condition has arisen. It may have a retarding and embellishing effect, but that is all, as the deceptive myth of preventive war indicates which advocates aggression for the solemnly declared purpose of avoiding it. It is as if someone would kill a man to save him the trouble of dying. p 53

If wars are due to the accumulation of the critical mass of *power*, and the critical mass of power can accumulate only in social organisms of critical *size*, the problems of aggression, like those of atrocity, can clearly again be solved in only one way - through the reduction of those organisms that have outgrown the proportions of human control. As we have seen, in the case of internal miseries, already cities may constitute such overgrown units, In the case of external miseries, only states can acquire critical size. This means that, if the world is to be relieved of some of the pressures of aggressive warfare, we can do little by trying to unite it. We should but increase the terror potential that comes from large size. What must be accomplished is the very opposite: the dismemberment of the vast united national complexes commonly called the great powers. For they alone in the contemporary world have the social size that enables them to spread the miseries we try to prevent, but cannot so long as we leave untouched the power which produces them. p 54

### **Chapter Three: DISUNION NOW**

Let us apply the philosophy of the size theory and see what solution the opposite direction might hold for us. Instead of union, let us have disunion now. Instead of fusing the small, let us dismember the big. Instead of creating fewer and larger states, let us create more and smaller ones. For from all we have seen until now, this seems the only way by which power can be pushed back to dimensions where it can do no spectacular harm, at least in its external effects. p 57

The re-establishment of small-state sovereignty would [thus] not only satisfy the never extinguished desire of these states for the restoration of their autonomy; it would disintegrate the cause of most wars as if by magic. There would no longer be a question of whether disputed Alsace should be united with France or Germany. With neither a France nor a Germany left to claim it, she would be Alsatian. She would be flanked by Baden and Burgundy, themselves then little states with no chance of disputing her existence. There would be no longer a question of whether Macedonia should be Yugoslav, Bulgarian, or Greek - she would be Macedonian; whether Transylvania should be Hungarian or Rumanian - she would be Transylvanian; or whether Northern Ireland should be part of Eire or Britain; she would be nobody's part. She would be North Irish. With all states small, they would cease to be mere border regions of ambitious neighbours. Each would be too big to be devoured by the other. The entire system would thus function as an automatic stabilizer. p 59

A small state Europe would mean the end of the devastating and pathological proportions of *national hostility* which can only thrive on the collectivized power mentality of large nation-states. Germans, Frenchmen, and Italians, weighed down by the perverting influence of their history of blood and gore, will always hate each other. But no Bavarian ever hated a Basque, no Burgundian a Brunswicker, no Sicilian a Hessian, no Scot a Catalan. No insult mars the history of their loose and distant relations. There would still be rivalries and jealousies, but none of the consuming hatreds so characteristic of the perpetually humourless and mentally underdeveloped big. . . .

The purpose of this analysis is not to furnish another of those fantastic plans for eternal peace so peculiar to our time. It is to find a *solution* to our worst social evils, not a way to *eliminate* them. The problem of war in modern times is not its occurrences, but its scale, its devastating magnitude. p 60



The war picture of the Middle Ages is thus one of bubbling numerous little waves washing over this and that region, but never unifying its particles into the proportions of a tidal wave rolling over the entire continent. And what strikes one upon closer study are less the wars than the frequent conditions of peace. As many a nostalgic traveller through Europe discovers, the Middle Ages built much more than they destroyed - which would hardly have been possible if our war picture of that era were correct. As in so many other respects, the *dark* ages of medieval times were even in their war aspects more advanced than our modern age with all its peace desires and its smug detractors of medieval backwardness. p 62

Their leaders [medieval] never believed in the unattainable nonsense of an eternal peace, and therefore never wasted their energy in trying to establish it. Knowing the substance of which man was made, they wisely based their systems on his shortcomings, not his pretensions. Unable to prevent war, they did the next best thing. They tried to control it. And in this they succeeded signally through an institution which they called *Treuga Dei*, the *Truce of God*.

This truce was based on the concept that war, as it was divisible regionally, was divisible also into separate actions and periods. According to its original provisions, all warfare had to be interrupted on Saturday noon and could not be resumed until Monday morning in order to ensure the undisturbed worship of the Lord on Sunday. Subsequently, the period of truce was extended to include Thursday in honour of Christ's ascension, Friday in reverent commemoration of the crucifixion, and all of Saturday in memory of His entombment. In addition to these time limitations, a number of places were declared immune from military action. Thus, even in the midst of war, neither churches and churchyards, nor fields at harvest time could be made the scene of battle. Finally, entire groups of persons such as women, children, old people, or farmers working in fields were placed under special protection and had to be left unmolested. Infractions of the Truce of God were punished by the Church as well as the State. p 63

Viewing the small-state world of the Middle Ages, we thus find that it provided by no means heavenly perfection. On the contrary, it was full of shortcomings and weaknesses, and full of the problems confronting life in general. But - and this was its great virtue - it was never terrorized by them since, on a small scale, even the most difficult problem dwindles to insignificant proportions. p 64

A single month of a modern great-power war costs more in life and wealth than the sum total of casualties and destruction of several centuries of medieval warfare put together.

The great powers, instead of pacifying the world, merely eliminated the much ridiculed operetta wars of the *dark ages*, giving us the real thing instead. Otherwise, their establishment changed nothing. The causes of war are still as ridiculous as they always were because great powers, while they have become fatter than their predecessors, have not become wiser. pp 65-66

The fact that modern wars are fewer in number can hardly be considered a praiseworthy contribution to peace if we take into account the misery they spread from one end of the world to the other. No small-state world could ever have produced similar effects, as the history of the Middle Ages shows, or even the contemporary history of the only large area where a small-state arrangement still exists - South America. There are always wars and revolutions going on in that continent, wars that nobody notices, which come and go like spring showers, which are settled without the expensive apparatus of a United Nations or a continental super-government, and which can be dismissed from the calendar of events by an editorial.

The great powers, arising in the guise of pacifiers, have thus given the world nothing but aches. They represent no progress. Instead of solving the problems of small states, they have magnified them to such unbearable proportions that only divine power, and no longer the ability of mortal man, could cope with them. pp 66-67

#### Chapter Four: TYRANNY IN A SMALL-STATE WORLD



A great-power world is safe and secure only if the government of *each* great power is in the hands of wise and good men (a combination that is rare even in democracies). As things are, however, great power attracts by its very nature the strong rather than the wise, and autocrats rather than democrats. So it is not surprising that, of the eight great powers existing before World War II, not one but four were under dictatorial rule: Germany, Italy, Japan, and Russia; and of the Big Four of the post-war world, two - Russia and China. And though

there are only two great-power dictatorships at the present time, there is not a corner on the globe remote enough to escape the terror of their existence. p 71

In a small-state world, there is a constant breathing and sneezing and changing that never permits the development of gigantic sub-surface forces. These can arise only in a large-power arrangement which provides prolonged periods of peace and allows powers to inhale with their formidable chests for entire decades, only to blow down everything in front of them when, at last, they begin to exhale their hurricanes.

p 73

It is not submissive disposition that leads to the misery of tyranny, but tyrannical power, growing in proportion to the size of the community, that leads at a critical magnitude to the condoning spirit of submission. Submissiveness is thus not a human quality that could be explained to a significant extent as the result of upbringing, tradition, national character, or the mode of production. Like most other social attitudes, it is the adaptive reflex reaction with which man responds to power. Its degree varies directly with the degrees of power, just as its opposite reaction, the assertion of freedom, varies inversely with it. Where there is power, there is submission, and where there is no submission, there is no power. This is why, historically, the seemingly most freedom-loving peoples have accepted tyranny as submissively as the seemingly most submissive ones, or why it is safe to say that even Americans would submit if our federal structure permitted the accumulation of the necessary volume of governmental power.

pp 76-77

#### **Chapter Five: THE PHYSICS OF POLITICS**

It was the knowledge derived from the Quantum Theory that has enabled us to penetrate the secret of the atom and, with it, of the entire universe. We found the key to the big by searching for the small, and it is not without significance that our age, which has developed such perverse yearnings for social colossalism and world-embracing organizations, is not named the colossal or unitarian age, but the atomic age, not after the largest but after one of the smallest aggregations of matter.

p 82

Smallness is not an accidental whim of creation. It fulfils a most profound purpose. It is the basis of stability and duration, of a graceful harmonious existence that needs no master. For little bodies, countless in number and forever moving, forever rearrange themselves in the incalculable pattern of a mobile balance whose function in a dynamic universe is to create orderly systems and organisms without the necessity of interfering with the anarchic freedom of movement granted to their component particles.

p 86

Only the totalitarian delights in oneness and unity rather than in the harmony produced by balanced diversity. And what does he gain by it? Casting aside the self-regulatory system of balances, he now needs the special effort of a stabilizer, a genius, a dictator who must consciously hold together what previously arranged itself automatically.

p 88

What seems wrong with our political universe is, of course, not that it is *balanced*, but that it is *badly* balanced. And it is badly balanced because, unlike the physical

universe, it is no longer composed of a *great* number of *small* mobile units which, as we have seen, are essential to an orderly pattern of behaviour, but of a *small* and shrinking number of immobile, though still moving, *huge* units - the great powers. With their emergence, the mobile balance, dependent on manifold littleness, could no longer function satisfactorily, and had to be replaced by a stable balance. p 88

A stable balance in the world of politics can be maintained only by conscious and continuous guidance. Every time a movement occurs in an over-aged social system, a powerful authority is needed to rearrange its hardened unified cells in a new balance. Hence the fanatical attempts of the statesmen of our time to create majestic super-governments in the form of League of Nations, United Nations, or World States, betraying that what the despised small-state world could do so effortlessly, the glorified big-power world cannot do at all: govern itself. It requires an external controlling agent. p 89

### Chapter Six: INDIVIDUAL AND AVERAGE MAN

If a society is too large, it breeds, as we have seen, social miseries such as aggressiveness, crime, or tyranny as a result of its very size. But also social *blessings* are concomitants of social size - *small size*. This is why only a small-state system is able to ensure both internally and externally ideals such as democratic freedom and cultural enlightenment, or why, as the following chapters will show, the worst of small states provides greater happiness to man than the best of large ones. p 98

The small state is by nature *internally* democratic. In it the individual can never be outranked impressively by the power of government whose strength is limited by the smallness of the body from which is derived. He must recognize the authority of the state, of course, but always as what it is. This is why in a small state he will never be floored by the glamour of government. He is physically too close to forget the purpose of its existence: that it is here to serve him, the individual, and has no other function whatever. p 98

While every kind of small state, whether republic or monarchy, is thus by nature democratic, every kind of large state is by nature undemocratic. This is true even if it is a declared republic and democracy. It is therefore by no means unnatural that some of the world's greatest tyrants such as Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler or Stalin arose on the soil of great states at the very moment when republicanism and democracy seemed to have reached a pinnacle of development. p 99

However democratic a large power may try to be, it cannot possibly be a democracy in the real (though not original) meaning and glory of the term - a government system serving the *individual*. Large powers must serve *society* and, as a result, all genuine ideals of democracy become reversed. Their life rhythm can no longer depend on the freedom and interplay of individuals. Instead they become dependent on organization. But good organization presupposes totalitarian uniformity and not democratic diversity. If everybody were to follow his own way in a large state, society would soon collapse. Individuals must therefore be magnetized into a few groupings within which they must stand as stiffly at attention as tube travelers during rush hours when they are likewise forced into directed, synchronized and magnetized behaviour by the condition



of crowding. Man the individual, the active, is replaced in mass states by man the type, the passive. p 101

Modern techniques have given some elasticity to the concept of what can be taken in at a single view, extending the population limit of healthy and manageable societies from hundreds of thousands to perhaps eight or ten million. But beyond this, our vision becomes blurred and our instruments of social control begin to develop defects which neither the physical nor the social sciences can surmount. For at that point, we come face to face with the instability which nature has imposed on oversize. p 108



In a tightly united one-power continent, for instance, embracing three or four hundred million people, the form of state must be either republican or monarchical in its entire expanse. Its form of government must either be democratic or totalitarian. Its economic system either socialist or capitalist. In each case, the system existing in one corner of the map must exist also in the opposite corner.

A huge mass of people must accept one special system though nearly half of it may be opposed to it. . . . The flexible adaptability to multitudes of individual desires, which is such an essential feature of true democracy, is thus completely lacking in the rigid framework of large-power organization whose very oneness represents a smothering totalitarian characteristic.

p 109

## Chapter Seven: THE GLORY OF THE SMALL

The only impressive thing in great powers is their excessive physical strength. As a result they can claim a place of honour only in a world that has greater veneration for physical prowess than for intellectual values, and is basically collectivist rather than individualist. To an individualist excessive strength signifies nothing but a threat to his integrity, and an invitation to ignore the development of his intellect. He abhors physical power beyond the degree that is necessary for the enjoyment of a healthy life. He will delight in the strength that enables him to engage in athletic competition or in fights such as those fought by medieval knights, which were noble because they were personal. But he will find no enchantment in the accumulation of massive power such as is produced by well-organized, mindless masses, and is capable of running against other well-organized mindless masses. pp 115-116

Small states, with their narrow dimensions and insignificant problems of communal living, give their citizens the time and leisure without which no great art could be developed. So negligible is the business of government that only a fraction of an individual's energies needs to be diverted into the channel of social service. Society runs almost on its own momentum and thus permits the dedication of the principal part of the citizen's life to the improvement of the individual rather than to the service of the state. p 118

Even crooks, if they cheat in impressive totals, are treated with awestruck respect, which again brings to mind Saint Augustine, that saintly deprecator of the big, who tells in the *City of God* (Book IV, Chapter IV) the following charming story:

For elegant and excellent was that pirate's answer to the great Macedonian Alexander, who had taken him: the king asking him how he durst molest the seas so, he replied with a free spirit, "How darest thou molest the whole world? But because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; thou doing it with a great navy, art called an emperor."

p 119

If we really want to go to the bottom of things, we have even today no other recourse after having tried Harvard and Oxford than to take down from their dusty shelves Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, the worth of Harvard and Oxford lies largely in the fact that they keep on their shelves the great men of the little states.

Yet these were no supermen. The secret of their wisdom was that they lived in a small society that displayed all the secrets of life before everybody's eyes. They saw each problem not as a giant part of an unsurveyable tableau, but as a fraction of the composite picture to which it belonged. Philosophers, as also poets and artists, were by nature *universal* geniuses because they always saw the totality of life in its full richness, variety, and harmony without having to rely on secondhand information or to resort to superhuman efforts.

p 124



This is what the reactionary little states of Italy and Germany have given to the world - beautiful cities, cathedrals, operas, artists, princes, some enlightened, some bad, some maniacs, some geniuses, all full-blooded, and none too harmful. What have the same regions given us as impressive great powers? As unified empires,

both Italy and Germany continued to boast of the monuments of a great civilization on their soil. But neither of them produced these. What they did produce were a bunch of unimaginative rulers and generals, Hitlers and Mussolinis. They, too, had artistic ambitions and wanted to embellish their capital cities but, instead of hundreds of capitals, there were now only two, Rome and Berlin, and instead of thousands of artists, there were now only two, Hitler and Mussolini. And their prime concern was not the creation of art but the construction of the pedestal, on which they themselves might stand. This pedestal was war. . . .

Having the choice between a great tradition of culture and a great tradition of aggressiveness they chose, as every great power does, the latter. The Italy and Germany of poets, painters, thinkers, lovers, and knights, became the factories of boxers, wrestlers, engineers, racers, aviators, footballers, road builders, generals, and dehydrators of swamps. Instead of annoyed defenders of little sovereignties, they became the virile rapers and back-stabbers first of the countries around them and then of the entire world.

pp 127-128

Culture is the product not of peoples but of individuals and, as we have seen, creative individuals cannot flourish in the consuming atmosphere of large powers. It makes no difference whether the people concerned are Germans, French, Italians, or English. Wherever the process of union comes to its logical conclusion, their cultural fertility withers away. As long as democracy, with its system of divisions, factions, and small-group balances, exists, or as long as the process of internal consolidation has not reached its end, even seemingly large powers may benefit from an afterglow of intellectual vitality without, however, being responsible for it. Great power and democracy, as the previous chapter has shown, are mutually exclusive in the long run, since bigness in its ultimate form cannot be maintained except by totalitarian organization. pp 129-130

### **Chapter Eight: THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SMALL**

If capitalism has had such stunning success in its earlier stages, it was not because of the incentive effect of private property relationships. Stalin medals produce the same results. It was because of its embodiment of the competitive principle whose most fundamental prerequisite is the side-by-side existence not of a few large but many small facilities requiring not the waste of extensive but the economy of intensive operation. And if it developed cracks in its later stages, it was not because of its social shortcomings but because of its infection with large-scale organisms such as monopolies or unsurveyably huge market areas which, far from being responsible for economic progress, seem to be its principal obstacle. p 133

If we travel three thousand miles from New York to Los Angeles, we find the same kind of city on which we have just turned our back. If we go to the village of Hudson, one of the most northern places along the Canadian National Railway hewn out of the wilderness of virgin forests, and walk into a restaurant, we find the same sort of place we have just left behind in Brooklyn. Things that might be different, we have passed by because our super highways have been smoothed and straightened to such an extent that we no longer can afford to lose time by driving slowly. We may race up and down the entire North American continent and see nothing but Main Street all over again, filled with the same kind of people, following the same kind of business, reading the same kind of funnies and columnists, sharing the same movie stars, the same thoughts, the same laws, the same morals, the same convictions. This is why, if we want to read really exciting adventure stories nowadays, we have to fall back on Homer. p 136



If in several European vast-area states such as Italy, France, or Germany, so many exciting though rapidly dwindling differences are still experienced on relatively short journeys, it is because the medieval small-state diversity has left so lasting an imprint that no unifying process has as yet been able to wipe it out. . . . However, soon these last refuges of former small-scale living will be swallowed up by the impending further improvements of our travel and transportation means. pp 136-137

If we could overcome the preposterous conceit of considering ourselves the most advanced of all generations, though no other generation has proved itself so utterly incapable of solving its problems as ours, we might at last surrender to the evidence of the facts and realize that the small-state world was economically as happy and satisfying as any world inhabited by man could be. p 145

No measure of human control, whether suggested by Karl Marx or Lord Keynes, can present a solution to problems which have arisen precisely because an organism has outgrown all human control. The cause of modern business cycle problems can therefore not be found in the *natural* functioning of capitalism, nor in the *mismanaged* or *immature* functioning of communism. It is found in the *vast scale* of modern economies. p 150

What is monopoly in the economic world? Nothing other than what great power is in the political world. It restricts material production and forces on us undifferentiated standardized goods, even as great power restricts our intellectual production, forcing on us standardized platitudes. But the problem of power manifests itself always in the same way, whether it is in the physical, the economic, or the political field. p 165

#### **Chapter Nine: UNION THROUGH DIVISION**

Within our smallest social units such as families, villages, counties or provinces, we can nearly always be happy even if we are not endowed with great wisdom. In fact, these are the only entities within which we can be happy at all. For no problem can arise there which could not be brought under control as easily as a chain reaction within the cantonized structure of an atomic pile.

But once we broaden our scope to regions beyond the horizon, and extend our affections to vast multitudes such as nations or humanity, everything begins to elude our grasp. What was ours in our ponds has been lost in the oceans, and our previously undisturbed emotions are now forever subject to the disturbances occurring on these vaster scales at every moment. In our villages, there may be an upsetting murder once in a decade. The rest of the time we live in unruffled peace. In a large community, on the other hand, there is murder, rape and robbery every hour in some distant corner. But since we are linked with every distant corner, every local incident turns into an issue, a cause, a national calamity clouding our skies not once in a decade but all the time. pp 170-171

The most significant illustration of the small-state principle as the mainspring of federal success is, however, not provided by contemporary examples but by one of the most unique political structures of the past, though it invariably produces nothing but jolly laughter amongst our sophisticated modern theorists when its name is mentioned. This is the Holy Roman Empire of which Lord Bryce has quite properly remarked that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. It was a loose federation uniting in a single framework most German and Italian states, and lasting for the fantastic period of a thousand years. . . .

The reason for its singular success and its extraordinary duration was that it was easy to rule. And it was easy to rule because of its small component parts. Like every political organism, it was besieged by thousands of frictions and problems. But none of these ever outgrew the small power of its central government. Even its largest unit was so weak that an insignificant Swiss count, a Bavarian margrave, or a Luxembourg duke could hold it together with a handful of soldiers plus the symbol of the imperial crown. . . .

When the Empire eventually began to break down, it was not because it was ramshackle and weak. That was the reason for its success. It was because at last, after nearly a thousand years of romantic and ineffectual existence, strength began to develop in its corners, producing on its soil the unified great powers of Prussia and Austria. Regional union thus meant not the preservation but the destruction of this much-ridiculed though great and truly international realm. What had survived a millennium of small-state existence was finally smashed by the cancer of its own great powers. pp 178-179

The fascinating secret of a well-functioning social organism seems thus to lie not in its overall unity but in its structure, maintained in health by the life-preserving mechanism of division operating through myriads of cell-splittings and rejuvenations taking place under the smooth skin of an apparently unchanging body. Wherever, because of age or bad design, this rejuvenating process of subdivision gives way to the calcifying process of cell unification, the cells, now growing behind the protection of their hardened frames beyond their divinely allotted limits, begin, as in cancer, to develop those hostile, arrogant great-power complexes which cannot be brought to an end until the infested organism is either devoured, or a forceful operation succeeds in restoring the small-cell pattern.

This is why such attempts at international union as the European Council or the United Nations are doomed to failure if they continue to insist on their present composition. Comprising within their framework a number of unabsorbably great powers, they suffer from the deadly disease of political cancer. pp 186-187

## **Chapter Ten: THE ELIMINATION OF GREAT POWERS**

International unions must seek, instead of the heavy stable balance of great-power organizations, the fluid mobile balance of multicellular small-state arrangements. The solution of their problems lies in the micro- not in the macro-political field. They must eliminate from their system not the small states but the great powers. This alone will furnish them with the internal mechanism for coping with the daily frictions of social life without the necessity of building up a governmental machine of such proportions that it could not be maintained even if it could be created. p 189

It is the great powers which lack the real basis of existence and are without autochthonous, self-sustaining sources of strength. It is they that are the *artificial* structures, holding together a medley of more or less unwilling little tribes. There is no 'Great British' nation in Great Britain. What we find are the English, Scots, Irish, Cornish, Welsh, and the islanders of Man. In Italy, we find the Lombards, Tyroleans, Venetians, Sicilians, or Romans. In Germany we find Bavarians, Saxons, Hessians,



Rhinelanders, or Brandenburgers. And in France, we find Normans, Catalans, Alsatians, Basques, or Burgundians. These little nations came into existence by themselves, while the great powers had to be created by force and a series of bloodily unifying wars. Not a single component part joined them voluntarily. They all had to be forced into them, and could be retained by them only by means of their division into *counties, Gaue, or departments*. . . .

So little fusion has taken place that, whenever the grip of a big power seems to loosen, its component parts, far from coming to its rescue, try everything to liberate themselves. When Hitler crumbled, the Bavarians wanted to secede from Germany and restore their ancient kingdom. Similarly, the Sicilians tried to set up an independent state after the defeat of Mussolini. The Scots of today are as Scottish as they were three hundred years ago. Living together with the English has only increased their desire for living apart. . . . And in France, even in relatively calm and settled times, there is a constant undercurrent of separatist movements and sentiments not only amongst the Alsatians, but amongst Catalans, Basques, Bretons, and Normans as well.

pp 194-195

By using the device of proportional representation together with an appeal to the powerful particularist sentiments always present in human groups, the condition of a small-state world, so essential a prerequisite of successful international union, could be established without force or violence. It would mean nothing but the abandonment of a few silly, though cherished, slogans of the turn-of-the-clock-back category, a bit of diplomacy, and a bit of technique.

p 196

#### **Chapter Eleven: BUT WILL IT BE DONE?**

No!

p 197

#### **Chapter Twelve: THE AMERICAN EMPIRE**



The purpose of an analysis is to analyse, to conclude, and to suggest. This I have done. To come forth with ringing appeals to humanity and declarations of faith in its wisdom, as is now so fashionable, is an entirely different proposition. In this particular case, most will even agree that, to believe in the willingness of the great powers to preside over their own liquidation for the purpose of creating a world free of the terrors which they alone are able to produce, would not be

a sign of faith in the first place, but of lunacy, as it is the sign of lunacy, and not of faith, to believe that atom bombs can be produced but need not necessarily be detonated.

Nevertheless, I agree that this analysis cannot simply be ended with a declaration of lack of faith. There is still one question to be answered. If there is no chance of the restoration of a small-state world because of the unwillingness of the great powers to apply the principle of division to themselves, what then? p 199

We proceed with seduction where the others use force. We assimilate the world through our goods, the others through their ideology. While the unity of the East is brought about by every Czech, Russian, or Chinese becoming a communist, the unity of the West is created by every Frenchman, Dutchman, or Italian becoming an American. This is preferable, I presume, but it spells national extinction for the peoples concerned all the same. We may say that, as Americans, they will at least be free, but so will all Czechs or Chinese once they have become convinced communists. Assimilation does not destroy freedom. It makes it meaningless. p 208

Unless we take a more outspoken and positive attitude towards [empire, as our destiny] we shall either become a nation of hypocrites or of neurotics, and still not gain the approval for which we seem so pathetically to crave. Many peoples have had empire and, instead of flagellating themselves, enjoyed it thoroughly. Why should not we? Whether we enjoy it or not, we shall still have it and, what is worse, be accused of aspiring to it even if we had not. This does not mean that I *advance* empire. I advocate a world of little states. But we *have* empire, and what I advocate is consequently not the possession of what we do not have, but the enjoyment of what we possess. If we have measles, we can just as well enjoy them. For if we do not, we shall still have measles. p 210

As *Washington Banktrends*, a realistic and unsentimental business news feature service, put it:

This nation is, apparently, cast for a heroic role in world affairs. To lead and police the world will be costly, bringing many changes. For example, a permanent munitions industry will be developed . . . It is a new kind of economy into which this nation is turning. It is the economy of world power, with world defence commitments of a permanent nature. With permanent arms and munitions will come, too, large standing armies and navies and air forces. Some form of the draft on a permanent basis is inevitable to support this heroic role in world politics. The subterfuge of a United Nations organization may serve to ease the transition period for those who find it hard to face the realities, but the burden of all accomplishment will be on the United States.

There is no reason to shed any tears about this apparent collapse of a great ideal because the United Nations never were such a great ideal in the first place. Though originally not meant to be the instrument of our imperial consolidation, they were not meant to be an instrument of the free nations either. . . . The best one could thus ever say of this great ideal was that it was a tool not of the free but of the big, and that, while not meant to foster the empire of one, it was designed under the 'subterfuge' of democratic verbiage to secure in perpetuity the empire of five. p 211

Since nothing is ultimate in this ever-changing creation, one may safely carry Tocqueville's predictions or, rather, deductions a step or two further and state that, whatever comes, the ultimate world state will go the road of all other ultimate world states of history. After a period of dazzling vitality, it will spend itself. There will be no war to bring about its end. It will not explode. Like the ageing colossi of the stellar

universe, it will gradually collapse internally, leaving as its principal contribution to posterity its fragments, the little states - until the consolidation process of big-power development starts all over again. This is not pleasant to anticipate. What is pleasant, however, is the realization that, in the intervening period between the intellectual ice ages of great-power domination, history will in all likelihood repeat itself and the world, little and free once more, will experience another of those spells of cultural greatness which characterized the small-state worlds of the Middle Ages and Ancient Greece.

p 216

#### **AFTERWORD: by the Author**

The pleasure of finding myself in opposition sometimes conveyed the impression that I never took the idea of smallness seriously despite myself and that because of this lack of seriousness, and despite my numerous articles, lectures, and books on the subject, the idea did not take root until the mid-1970s, when it was presented by E.F. Schumacher with greater religious fervour in a best-selling book bearing the fetching title, *Small Is Beautiful*.

However, there has never been a question of my not taking seriously the idea that smallness offers the only solution to the problems of bigness. pp 217-218

Am I still pessimistic in 1978, when *The Breakdown of Nations* is being republished, about the prospect of a small-scale arrangement replacing the current big-power setup, as I was in 1941 when the idea was conceived? As in 1951 when the book was written? Or as in 1957 when I found at last a publisher in the kindred soul of Sir Herbert Read, the gentle anarchist of Routledge & Kegan Paul, just as I had made up my mind to transcribe my manuscript on parchment in illuminated medieval script rather than submit it anywhere ever again? Is my answer still an emphatic “No!” to the question whether I believe that the big powers will ever agree to their dismantlement merely because this would be the only way of saving the world from the atomic war into which their critical mass is inexorably pushing it?

Yes! My answer is still: “No!” Were it otherwise, I would have written a new book, not an Afterword to an old one. . . .

When an idea becomes universally accepted and its apostles become campus gurus or make the front cover of *Time*, it usually means that the idea has reached the end of its career. pp 221-222

But what about the younger generation? Well, the trouble is that when the younger person gets older, he usually views historic action not from a new, but from exactly the same, perspective as everyone else who has made the transition before him. To judge by the direction of protest movements and campus demonstrations, there has been a turnover of students, but no rejuvenation of outlook. The young people of today have yet to grasp that the unprecedented change that has overtaken our time concerns not the *nature* of our social difficulties, but their *scale*. Like their elders, they have yet to become aware that what matters is no longer war, but *big* war; not unemployment, but *massive* unemployment; not oppression, but the *magnitude* of oppression; not the

poor, who Jesus said will always be with us, but the scandalous *number* of their multitudes.

p 223

I am ending *The Breakdown of Nations* for the second time on a note of pessimism. But pessimism is not despair. Should we be depressed because we all must die? Or should we not rather use this as the very reason for enjoying life? It is the optimist who is usually condemned to a life of misery, disappointment, and gloom by working his head off in the belief that hard labour will get him back into paradise. Like a Sunday preacher, he shows us the way to heaven by talking about nothing but the torments of hell. *My* interpretation may be pessimistic. But once we accept our imperfections, the wisest thing is to come to terms with them and follow the advice of my father, an Austrian country doctor who, when asked by a distressed peasant what he should do about his belated case of measles, answered: "Enjoy yourself. Because if you don't, you still have measles."

p 224