

The Anatomy of Terror and Revolution

A Prefatory Note

THE ESSAYS in this issue of *Modern Age* relate variously, in their common thematic focus, to terror and revolution, the conditions of which increasingly afflict our lives. "We live in the midst of the alarms of war and revolution," Professor Crane Brinton writes in his celebrated book, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, published in 1938 and issued in a revised edition in 1952. We need, he goes on to advise, to understand revolution in its characteristics and consequences, but to do so we need to cultivate a certain scientific impartiality and detachment. Yet as acts of terror and revolution now proliferate, it is no longer possible for us to adopt a posture of sheer critical disinterestedness. As the following essays show, at times with dramatic and even frightening import, terror and revolution embody much more than a dynamic fact of political existence. Too much has happened in indiscriminately destructive terms of terror and revolution — and is still happening — to warrant either the comfort of detached scholarly assessment or the regnant view in the intellectual community that no relation can exist between history and morality, but that if it did exist, it would be an abstraction to be deplored and spurned.

We are, it seems, endlessly presented with diagnostic charts, summaries, statistics, graphs, figures, and policy reports dealing with terror and revolution. And we are asked to treat them in their exclusively external, social-political, and economic aspects — as some special sociological phenomenon or spectacle to be instantly and scientifically analyzed. Terror and revolution, in short, constitute a dynamic fact of our material existence — and that is as far as many social scientists and historical commentators appear or want to go in their positivistic "interpretations." Thus, in the course of his "attempt to describe without evaluating," Brinton counsels the suspension of moral judgment in the posited hope of better understanding things without seeking to change them or to subordinate them to ostensibly distorting sentiments, partisanship, and prejudices. That attempt, as Eric Voegelin reminds us, is a gnostic fallacy of perilous consequences; certainly it has for far too long dominated the discussion of terror and revolution and of many other critical issues as well.

Towards the repair of the effects of this fallacious approach — amoral or even perhaps immoral — the essays that follow should help readers to gauge basic metaphysical roots and offshoots of terror and revolution and in the process to perceive the moral complexity and the moral valuation that are intrinsic dimensions of the anatomy of terror and revolution. As Hermann Rauschning remarks in his *Men of Chaos* (1942): "When the supreme conceptions and moral values lose their authority, revolutions become inevitable." To reject moral insight into or to ignore the "moral results," as Edmund Burke

would have it, of terror and revolution ultimately impoverishes the true and full understanding that Brinton would supposedly have us seek. The positivist mind would prefer to equip us with half-truths, which are given with sickening frequency and emphasis in the popular press and in the articles and books that are singled out for attention in the major reviewing media. The moral constant, no less than the moral imperative, which compels us to judge temporal values in the light of eternal and universal values and also as a component of our spiritual inheritance, is, it sadly appears, seldom invoked or considered and is, indeed, an unwanted and unwelcome element in "the house of intellect."

Those who reflect on the following essays will perhaps discover why the moral — and the spiritual — element constitutes a deep, hidden power that in the end transcends not only the "sociology of revolutions," as Brinton puts it, but also the romanticization of terror and revolution in much of modern life, literature, and thought: what Albert Camus has euphemistically termed "this long adventure of rebellion." Perhaps, too, they will discover why the moral element is particularly alien to the liberal intelligentsia and is possibly even a threat to its own reign of terror in the intellectual community and its oppressive satellites. — G.A.P.