

## *What is Bigotry?*

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I AM A NIHILIST professor of philosophy. I once believed that intolerance of my teaching would come primarily from the Right. I was wrong. Liberal professors have condemned my nihilism as un-academic philosophy, some even attempting to prevent my teaching it at any college or university. Conservative colleagues have never been that intolerant of our disagreement about what constitutes proper academic teaching of philosophy. This intolerance springs from liberalism's fear of its inherent nihilism. Liberals really are on my side. They are nihilists too cowardly to face their own nihilism.

Whittaker Chambers indirectly showed liberalism's nihilist consequences in his comments on Bukharin's last words. Under pressure from Stalin's Communist party, Bukharin, one of the original leaders, confessed to crimes of which both he and Stalin knew him to be innocent. His final words reveal the dread of nihilism responsible for his willingness to do whatever the Party required. Bukharin said:

I shall now speak of myself, of the reasons for my repentance. . . . For when you ask yourself: "If you must die, what are you dying for?"—an absolutely black nothingness suddenly rises before you with startling vividness. There was nothing to die for if one wanted to die unrepentant. . . . This, in the end, disarmed me completely and led me to bend my knees before the party and the country. And when you ask yourself: "Very well, suppose you do not die; suppose by some miracle you remain alive, again for

what? Isolated from everybody, an enemy of the people, in an inhuman position, completely isolated from everything that constitutes the essence of life." And at such moments, comrade judges, everything personal, all personal incrustation, all rancor, pride and a number of other things fall away, disappear. . . .<sup>1</sup>

What Bukharin meant by "everything personal . . . all personal rancor, pride" is elaborated in the fictional version of his speech in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (chapter 4). The close of this speech is sparked by an intellectual candor foreign to the pious histrionics which embolden a Thoreau, a Gandhi, or a King to hurl defiance at his accusers. Too honest to embrace illusions about man's divine or natural rights, Bukharin has only his self-created faith in his party and its leader: "Vanity and the last remains of pride whispered to me: Die in silence, say nothing, or die with a noble gesture, with a moving swan-song on your lips; pour out your heart and challenge your accusers. That would have been easier for an old rebel, but I overcame the temptation."

Chambers comments: "I do not understand how men, knowing that another man spoke these words at such a moment, can read them and fail to be rent apart by their meaning. . . . I would print them bold and hang them at the front of college classrooms."<sup>2</sup> Chambers was wrong in the case of most liberal academics—and this means most American professors, es-

pecially those at “prestigious” universities. Bukharin’s words cannot touch the souls of intellectuals bent upon conscious or unconscious obfuscation of the nihilism informing their liberalism.

To grasp the deep need for this obfuscation, one must first comprehend nihilism’s meaning. Like most technical philosophic jargon, “nihilism” is a pretentious way of saying something simple, an effort to flee the horror in that simplicity. Nihilism means “nothing” or “nothingness.” It teaches that nothing—and only nothing!—is real or true. Hereafter I use words such as “nothing,” “nothingness,” “emptiness,” or “void” instead of “nihilism.” This avoids the window-dressing of philosophic or scholarly jargon designed to hide reality’s nothingness.

My philosophy is that nothing really exists. Consequently any faith in anything’s being something rather than nothing, any desire to be alive rather than dead, is illusory. The conviction that one’s self or anything else is something and not nothing contradicts the basic, “unchangeable” character of reality, which is nothing. In this decisive sense, life in all its forms is self-contradictory. Thus any effort to be genuinely philosophic or scientific—to know reality for what it is—must, like all attempts to do *anything*, be self-contradictory. Only being and doing nothing are consistent with reality’s emptiness. The love of death informing Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* is more realistic than the desire for self-preservation. There is no self to preserve.

Nothing is easier to perceive than reality’s emptiness. Genuine philosophy or science is the realization that nothing, no divine or natural order, endows anything with a non-arbitrary being, an identity not subject to radical change at any moment. There is nothing in (or behind or above) things to make them more than empty experiences, impressions, as Hume called them. Reality and everything in it are nothing but empty impressions, experiences, dreams whose dreamer is himself a dream.

Here the paths of men part; the crucial line is drawn between those with faith in

something, especially in some moral-political cause, and those who see themselves and the universe for the nothing which they and it are. I side with realists for whom everything high or low (including the distinction between high and low, true and false, right and wrong, life and death) is radically devalued when grasped in its essential nothingness.

This devaluation seems ridiculous or abhorrent to the vast majority whose need for faith in common sense, in their being something and not nothing, compels rejection of genuine philosophy or liberal education. The “liberal” in liberal education means liberation from that common-sense faith. In a shallow sense, this liberation guarantees unlimited freedom, unrestrained even by some non-arbitrary personal identity. True liberalism, the product of liberal education, is the liberation of nothing to its nothingness. That liberation opens an abyss in which nothing is forbidden or commanded, good or bad, true or false. Any effort to establish impersonal, unbiased criteria about anything—including philosophy or science—is, in reality, bigotry at its worst. It is an un-self-conscious form of Bukharin’s consciously fanatic determination to avoid life’s emptiness.

Reality’s “absolutely black nothingness” was obfuscated by ancient-medieval pieties and still is obfuscated by their remnants in contemporary “philosophy” and “science.” Real philosophy or science makes it impossible to create in oneself the illusion of being something rather than nothing. Consequently nothing is less welcome in universities than academic courses and programs encouraging genuine philosophy. Precisely such courses seem un-academic to pseudo-philosophers whose fear of reality’s nothingness requires uplifting propaganda rather than education.

When Chambers recommended Bukharin’s last words or when I recommend Max Beckmann’s grim woodcut self-portrait (1922), as I usually do in every philosophy course, they are not recommended because they belong to academic dis-

ciplines called "political science" or "art" in order to promote "interdisciplinary" studies between them and "philosophy." I use Bukharin and Beckmann, as I use Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* or Grosz's *Ecce Homo*, because they are among the few attempts seriously to confront the horror of self-knowledge and knowledge of one's world or worlds. This is the only worthwhile goal of any study, "disciplinary" or "interdisciplinary."

In this decisive sense, no real distinction exists between sciences and humanities or between any of the so-called disciplines. What any academic institution worthy of the name does for its students and teachers is done insofar as it can be by serious reflection on works such as Bukharin's last words or Beckmann's self-portrait. If the goal of education, as distinct from propaganda, is unflinching confrontation with the truth, such reflection is the heart of the always agonizing enterprise of learning and teaching.

The usual pseudo-academic obfuscation of that agony, and therefore of real education, was brought home to me by an exchange between a student and a professor about the worth of a class. The student asked how the course would help her to know herself and her world. The professor saw the course primarily as "rounding out the major" in his discipline. His was a safe, conventional answer to her dangerously unconventional question.

"Discipline" is a military term. One disciplines oneself to reject "forbidden fruit." Discipline substitutes for rational persuasion, particularly when reason is with the forbidden, life-threatening temptation. The professor's flight to his discipline reflects the drive, conscious or unconscious, to escape the moral-political void created by his liberalism. Anyone taking Bukharin's words to heart realizes the powerful need for the professor's intellectual cowardice.

The student was asking for genuine knowledge of her world, blissfully unaware that knowledge reveals an "absolutely black nothingness." The professor's cowardly unwillingness to risk her question in-

dicates more awareness of its horror. This awareness was mercifully diluted for him by pride in his discipline.

That dilution is anathema in any academic institution whose aim is education and not propaganda on behalf of salutary myths. In Thomas Mann's *Tristan* (chapter 10), the usual replacement of education by propaganda is deplored: "The world is full of what I call the 'unconscious type' and I cannot stand all this dumb, unknowing, uncomprehending life and action, this world of infuriating naiveté around me! It tortures me, driving me irresistibly to explain, to articulate all existence, to bring it to self-consciousness as far as I can . . . unconcerned whether the consequences are helpful or harmful, whether it brings relief or intensifies the pain." Bukharin's words, like Beckmann's self-portrait, demonstrate that real education always intensifies the pain.

The professor's flight from the student's question avoids that pain. When those sharing his intellectual cowardice band together, they create, over centuries, a shield of respectability for their "disciplines" and for schools as refuges where they are free to bury themselves in their pseudo-academic studies. For them Wagner is a "musician" whose work is best evaluated by "experts" in music departments. Each department is free to deal with its own discipline by its accepted "methodologies." This is one of the most frequent misinterpretations of academic freedom. Shielded by this mindless view of academic freedom from the harshness of the student's question, the professor confidently dismissed it. In this important respect, he mirrors the liberal democracy shaping his defective pedagogy.

Liberal democracy's pluralism encourages faith in one's right to form groups to defend one's group-interests. Generally political liberals see as little arbitrariness in this right as academic liberals see in the defense of their version of their discipline's interest. Indeed the same liberally inspired intellectual dishonesty sparks faith in both academic and civil rights. For if no "laws of nature and nature's god" exist to endow

men with “unalienable rights” to life and liberty, those rights are grounded in nothing. Then all efforts to secure them are no better than Bukharin’s fanatic willing of communist authority in the face of reality’s “absolutely black nothingness.”

I doubt that the cry from the abyss shaping both Bukharin’s words and Beckmann’s self-portrait could eliminate the intellectual dishonesty responsible for the professor’s evasion of the student’s question. Probably such terrors would only strengthen his resolve to hide whatever doubts he had behind dedication to his discipline and to the civil rights supporting that dedication.

His illusions can be maintained only in a liberal democracy whose faith in its God-given rights has not suffered dissolution by rejection of the traditional pieties supporting the rights. Many liberal professors are unaware that their attack on those pieties (as outmoded superstitions or prejudices) also undermines their academic (civil) right to avoid serious education by flight to their disciplines. Should they lose that right, the true meaning of education might well dawn upon them. This will occur if America loses its war with Russia. If the subsequent loss of all civil rights leads to perception of their nothingness, even liberal professors will be faced with the terrifying choice forced upon Bukharin by authentic education: frank acknowledgment of reality’s “absolutely black nothingness” or fanatic commitment to its obfuscation. Until that grim day Chambers’s plea for serious academic consideration of Bukharin’s words provides at least some antidote to the cheerful intellectual bigotry endemic to liberal democratic schools.

In his last speech to his judges, Bukharin also deplored the “doubts” and vacillations of “Western European and American intellectuals” about the extreme demands of Communist loyalty, particularly in view of his own confession. He despised those doubts as remnants of faith in illusory ancient-medieval pieties which were intended to guarantee that one’s self and its “rights” were not nothing. His contempt

for the intellectual pabulum fortifying the Thoreaus, Gandhis, and Kings, so revered by pseudo-academics, left him open to life’s only serious struggle: the war between reason and passion. Reason (insight into reality’s nothingness) is repellent to passion.

All passions are teleological, striving to obtain some good or avoid some evil. Consequently all passions are irrational, subsisting on faith in common sense’s teleological world of goods to pursue and selves to pursue them. When genuine philosophy, liberal education, forces abandonment of this faith, the wrath and frustration of the passions is directed against reality itself. Like liberalism (their external, political reflection) the rabid, because enlightened, passions now demand “rights” to which reason does not entitle them. That demand becomes more strident the more its irrationality is perceived. Its most virulent, and therefore most mindless, form is radical communism, Bukharin’s fanatic obedience unto death. In Bukharin, liberalism has seen itself for the nothing that it, at bottom, is. Terrified by that insight, it seeks salvation in fanatic efforts to delude itself.

The twentieth century’s most realistic efforts to be political, communism and nazism, basically concur on the need for this fanatic zeal. It is the ground of their realism as distinct from liberal propaganda’s comforting dreams about humanity and its rights. Nobody better understood this than Rudolf Hess, whose fanatic loyalty to Hitler ended—and could only end—with his suicide in Spandau.

In *The Infancy of Nazism: The Memoirs of Ex-Gauleiter Krebs*, Krebs describes the fanaticism shared by Hess and Bukharin and by anyone determined to create moral-political order out of reality’s void:<sup>3</sup> “Hess’ confession of his faith was not based on personal reverence for Hitler . . . One dare not wait for a leader or call for one; one must *will* him! If all national socialists and ultimately the entire nation honestly *will* Hitler to be their leader, and then are prepared to be completely loyal to him, then Hitler actually will

be the leader that Germany needs." To those emphasizing Hitler's faults and weaknesses, Hess answered: "I know! I know! Hitler too has faults and weaknesses. But if you had understood me correctly you would not have raised that objection. It depends on us whether we show the world his merits or his faults."

Krebs goes on, "Hess willed a *Führer* clothed with the glory of political infallibility and therefore did everything he could to present Hitler in his form to the nation. What was tragic in this was that he, who knew Hitler so well, actually did not believe in him but rather compelled himself to faith and, if need be, would hurl himself into the breach for Hitler." To recalcitrant Nazis who accused Hess of deluding himself, he answered that they would create a democratic anarchy of conflicting wills and viewpoints: "If you look at everything from all sides and you want free discussion about it, you never will reach a political decision."

In his characterization of Heidegger's nazism, Karl Löwith caught the heart of that movement and of its communist twin:

The spirit of national socialism was not so much concerned with the national and the social but much more with that radically private resoluteness which rejects any discussion or mutual understanding because it relies wholly and only on itself . . . . At bottom all its concepts and words are the expression of the bitter and hard resoluteness of a will asserting itself in the face of its own nothingness, a will proud of its loathing for happiness, reason and compassion.<sup>4</sup>

That loathing is reflected in the brutality of communist and nazi politics but more clearly in the fanaticism of a Hess or a Bukharin. In their "absolutely black nothingness" nobody has a right to anything. Faith in one's "rights" must first be created by fanatic repression of real philosophy or liberal education. Genuine Nazis or Communists freely acknowledge the need for this liberal repression of liberalism's core prevents this realization by pseudo-liberal professors. This is why nihilism

generally is more tolerated by conservative than by liberal professors.

Consistent conservatives require faith in the ancient-medieval pieties discredited by liberal education. Harry Jaffa has done most to make them aware of this requirement.<sup>5</sup> Insofar as that faith still moves conservative appeals to duty, honor, and country, they tend to be more tolerant, even somewhat compassionate, about what they regard as my misguided teaching. The strength of their piety prevents my nihilism from touching their souls.

Lacking that faith (in divine support for their right to exist) liberal professors often experience the terror of my teaching far more than conservatives. I unmask their flight to their "established" disciplines as intellectual dishonesty. I believe that the "discipline" of philosophy is primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with facing reality's "absolutely black nothingness." That confrontation is not something to be relegated to a sub-discipline called "ethics" in a larger discipline called "philosophy," which comprises the established, traditional fields of "ontology," "logic," "epistemology," "aesthetics," etc. Any attempt to abandon philosophy's main concern to this comfortable sub-department is as vain as the claim that philosophy means impersonal, unbiased inquiry and not always personal prejudices.

My enemies in the liberal intelligentsia dominating many philosophy departments sometimes claim that my reduction of philosophy and all education to mere prejudice is my own prejudice. Rightly so! For I believe that one's own very personal biases are all that anyone can know about anything. All efforts to live (and this includes knowing and believing) to be something and not nothing—including this paper!—must be biased and indeed self-contradictory. The self that they contradict—anything's true self—is reality's "absolutely black nothingness." Refusal to acknowledge the bigoted, because self-contradictory, character of life in all forms is the real root of all lesser bigotry, particularly of all moral-political passions ("values"). Bigotry is unavoidable for men

determined to be something rather than nothing.

No impersonal, unbiased research is possible, if the only impersonal, unbiased fact is nothingness. Any effort to make something of it, including all attempts at genuine communication or community, necessarily is more or less fanatic prejudice. It remains fanaticism even and especially when it is interpreted as reason or common sense. It surely does not cease to be personal bias because pseudo-academic philosophers, over years, have agreed among themselves that any work accredited by them is impersonal, unbiased research and not sheer bigotry.

Because my academic enemies are afraid to face their liberalism's inherent nothingness, they cannot, as I freely do, admit that their views on academic philosophy are nothing but prejudice. Nothing is more destructive of genuinely academic teaching of philosophy than this refusal to acknowledge the necessarily bigoted character of one's most passionately held convictions. This refusal would make sense only if a God, some non-arbitrary source of truth and being, existed, to ensure that reality was more than empty experiences or impressions. Such divine support would guarantee that there was a final truth by which one could decide which beliefs are mere prejudices and which really are true. This faith in divine revelation was characteristic of ancient-medieval philosophy and its delusions. I interpret recourse to such a *deus ex machina* as a naive, and therefore trivial version of the serious fanaticism freely chosen by Bukharin and Hess.

The abysmal superficiality of pseudo-liberal academic philosophers springs from their inability to perceive their own need for this divine revelation. Without realizing it, they still are mired in the pious myths of ancient-medieval philosophy and science. This lack of self-knowledge permits them to despise Orthodox Jews, Christians, and Moslems, deriding them as champions of outdated superstition. They fail to note that remnants of the same bigotry are presupposed by their faith in

the impersonal, unbiased character of their own research. Without a God to create something out of reality's nothing, the very attempt to be unbiased is far more bigoted than the self-conscious fanaticism of Bukharin or Hess. For that attempt does not realize how biased against reality and truth it is; Bukharin and Hess do.

Liberal professors of philosophy tend to regard themselves as intellectually superior to a Bukharin or a Hess. As if reality's void did not negate any claim to non-arbitrary superiority (or equality or inferiority)! They fear to admit that Hess or Bukharin or Khomeini know as much about what should be taught in philosophy departments as they do. What they fear is beautifully shown in Himmler's prejudices about proper scientific methodology:

Himmler called me to account about a professor who lectured on pre-historic times . . . . This man had been criticizing nazi ideas about the origin of the Teutons and had condemned these ideas from alleged scientific points of view . . . . What ideas, Himmler said, these gentlemen get into their heads! Their scientific views were of no interest to anybody, they were just their private prejudices. But if the state or party declared a certain view as the desired starting point for scientific research, that view must be accepted as a scientific axiom, and there must be no shilly-shallying about it, still less malevolent criticism.

We don't care a hoot whether this or something else was the real truth about the prehistory of the German tribes. Science proceeds from hypotheses that change every year or so. So there's no earthly reason why the party should not lay down a particular hypothesis as the starting point, even if it runs counter to current scientific opinion . . . . The teaching of German origins has depended for centuries on a falsification. We are scientifically entitled to impose one of our own at any time.<sup>6</sup>

If science means knowledge of reality's nothingness, then nothing prevents Himmler or anyone else from scientifically imposing his prejudices—except lack of police and military support. Once this support is obtained, one's cherished moral-political prejudices may indeed seem more

than nothing to those requiring such opiates. A genuinely liberal education strives to liberate men from the need for intellectual opiates, refuges from reality's emptiness. Real academic freedom is the freedom to confront that void's terror. It is a travesty of academic freedom to avoid that confrontation by appeals to one's professionalism, the alleged impartial objective standards of one's discipline. In this crucial sense, Hess, Bukharin, and Himmler in their Nazi "loathing for happiness, reason, and compassion" are better academic philosophers than professors pluming themselves on their unbiased impartiality. For similar reasons, only a Bukharin or a Hess knows what it really means to call philosophy or anything else a "discipline."

Only a discipline ruthlessly inculcated over centuries and millennia, in the face of reality's nothingness, creates the illusion that anything is something and not nothing. Pseudo-academics are repelled when reminded that this successful indoctrination into their bigotry is the meaning of

their pride in their discipline and its claim to professionalism. On the other hand, they find it beneath them to embrace the old, fundamentalist faith which they imply and which consistent conservatives seek to conserve: Divine guidance would be required to save their lives from reality's nothingness.

This crucial point was clear to Heidegger, the last great Western thinker, who as late as 1953 still praised nazism's "inner truth and greatness."<sup>7</sup> In his final, posthumously published interview, he said: "Only a God can save us now."<sup>8</sup> Conscious of the unconscious bigotry fortifying pseudo-academics, Heidegger's nazism confronted him with that "absolute black nothingness" from which "only a God can save us now." Even if all hope for such divine revelation is vain, as I believe it is, no serious man can avoid being deeply moved in its presence. Chambers's remarks about Bukharin's last words also apply to Heidegger's: "Is there not a stillness in the room where you read this? That is the passing of the wings of tragedy."

<sup>1</sup>Report on the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Block of Rightists and Trotskyites. (Heard before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R., Moscow, evening session, March 12, 1983), pp. 767 ff. <sup>2</sup>Odyssey of a Friend: Whittaker Chambers' Letters to William F. Buckley, Jr., ed. Buckley (New York, 1969), p. 163. <sup>3</sup>The Infancy of Nazism: The Memoirs of Ex-Gauleiter Albert Krebs, 1923-1933, ed and trans. William Sheridan Allan (New York, 1976), pp. 206 ff. <sup>4</sup>Karl Lowith, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart, 1960), pp. 122-23. <sup>5</sup>Harry V. Jaffa, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss," *The Claremont Review*

*of Books* (Fall 1984), 14-21; "The Legacy of Leo Strauss Defended," *The Claremont Review of Books* (Spring 1985), 20-24; Neumann, "Political Philosophy or Nihilist Science? Education's Only Serious Question," in *Natural Right and Political Right: Essays in Honor of Harry V. Jaffa* (Durham, 1984), pp. 365-74. <sup>6</sup>Hermann Rauschnigg, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York, 1940), pp. 226-27. <sup>7</sup>Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York, 1961), p. 166. <sup>8</sup>Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten!" ["Only a God can Save Us Now!"], *Der Spiegel* (May 31, 1976), 193, 209.