Chapter V

True and False Subjectivism

The subjective stage of human development is that critical juncture in which, having gone forward from symbols, types, conventions, having turned its gaze superficially on the individual being to discover his truth and right law of action and its relation to the superficial and external truth and law of the universe, our race begins to gaze deeper, to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface and therefore to live from within. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the self, away from knowledge of things as the not-self and from the living according to this objective idea of life and the universe. Everything depends on how that step is taken, to what kind of subjectivity we arrive and how far we go in self-knowledge; for here the dangers of error are as great and far-reaching as the results of right seeking. The symbolic, the typal, the conventional age avoid these dangers by building a wall of self-limitation against them; and it is because this wall becomes in the end a prison of self-ignorance that it has to be broken down and the perilous but fruitful adventure of subjectivism undertaken.

A psychic self-knowledge tells us that there are in our being many formal, frontal, apparent or representative selves and only one that is entirely secret and real; to rest in the apparent and to mistake it for the real is the one general error, root of all others and cause of all our stumbling and suffering, to which man is exposed by the nature of his mentality. We may apply this truth to the attempt of man to live by the law of his subjective being whether as an individual or as a social unit one in its corporate mind and body.

For this is the sense of the characteristic turn which modern civilisation is taking. Everywhere we are beginning, though still sparsely and in a groping tentative fashion, to approach things
from the subjective standpoint. In education our object is to
know the psychology of the child as he grows into man and
to found our systems of teaching and training upon that basis.
The new aim is to help the child to develop his intellectual,
aesthetic, emotional, moral, spiritual being and his communal
life and impulses out of his own temperament and capacities,—
a very different object from that of the old education which was
simply to pack so much stereotyped knowledge into his resisting
brain and impose a stereotyped rule of conduct on his struggling
and dominated impulses.¹ In dealing with the criminal the most
advanced societies are no longer altogether satisfied with regarding
him as a law-breaker to be punished, imprisoned, terrified,
hanged or else tortured physically and morally, whether as a
revenge for his revolt or as an example to others; there is a
growing attempt to understand him, to make allowance for his
heredity, environment and inner deficiencies and to change him
from within rather than crush him from without. In the general
view of society itself, we begin to regard the community, the
nation or any other fixed grouping of men as a living organism
with a subjective being of its own and a corresponding growth
and natural development which it is its business to bring to
perfection and fruition. So far, good; the greater knowledge, the
truer depth, the wiser humanity of this new view of things are
obvious. But so also are the limitations of our knowledge and
experience on this new path and the possibility of serious errors
and stumblings.

If we look at the new attempt of nations, whether subject
or imperial, to fulfil themselves consciously and especially at
the momentous experiment of the subjective German nation-
ality, we shall see the starting-point of these possible errors.
The first danger arises from the historical fact of the evolution
of the subjective age out of the individualistic; and the first
enormous stumble has accordingly been to transform the error

¹ There has been a rude set-back to this development in totalitarian States whose theory
is that the individual does not exist and only the life of the community matters, but this
new larger view still holds its own in freer countries.
of individualistic egoism into the more momentous error of a
great communal egoism. The individual seeking for the law of
his being can only find it safely if he regards clearly two great
psychological truths and lives in that clear vision. First, the ego
is not the self; there is one self of all and the soul is a portion of
that universal Divinity. The fulfilment of the individual is not the
utmost development of his egoistic intellect, vital force, physical
well-being and the utmost satisfaction of his mental, emotional,
physical cravings, but the flowering of the divine in him to its
utmost capacity of wisdom, power, love and universality and
through this flowering his utmost realisation of all the possible
beauty and delight of existence.

The will to be, the will to power, the will to know are per-
fectly legitimate, their satisfaction the true law of our existence
and to discourage and repress them improperly is to mutilate
our being and dry up or diminish the sources of life and growth.
But their satisfaction must not be egoistic, — not for any other
reason moral or religious, but simply because they cannot so
be satisfied. The attempt always leads to an eternal struggle
with other egoisms, a mutual wounding and hampering, even a
mutual destruction in which if we are conquerors today, we are
the conquered or the slain tomorrow; for we exhaust ourselves
and corrupt ourselves in the dangerous attempt to live by the
destruction and exploitation of others. Only that which lives
in its own self-existence can endure. And generally, to devour
others is to register oneself also as a subject and predestined
victim of Death.

No doubt, so long as we live without self-knowledge, we
can do no other; men and nations have to act and think egoisti-
cally, because in their self-ignorance that is the only life known
to them, and to live is their God-given impulse; therefore they
must live egoistically rather than not at all, with whatever curb
of law, ethics and practical common sense of self-restraint na-
ture and experience have taught them. But subjectivism is in
its very nature an attempt at self-knowledge and at living by a
true self-knowledge and by an inner strength, and there is no
real gain in it if we only repeat the old error in new terms.
Therefore we must find out that the true individual is not the ego, but the divine individuality which is through our evolution preparing to emerge in us; its emergence and satisfaction and not the satisfaction of the mere egoistic will-to-live for the sake of one’s lower members is the true object at which a humanity subjectively seeking to know and fulfill its own deepest law and truth should increasingly aim.

The second psychic truth the individual has to grasp is this, that he is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind, — let us leave aside for the moment that which seems to be not of his kind. That which we are has expressed itself through the individual, but also through the universality, and though each has to fulfill itself in its own way, neither can succeed independently of the other. The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development or self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral or religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfillment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth. The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; it is the thing whose possibilities he individually expresses, even when he transcends its immediate level, and of which in his phenomenal being he is one result. Its depression strikes eventually at his own sources of life, by its increasing he also increases. This is what a true subjectivism teaches us, — first, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape. It is the old Indian discovery that our real “I”
is a Supreme Being which is our true self and which it is our
business to discover and consciously become and, secondly, that
that Being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the
collectivity,\(^2\) and only by admitting and realising our unity with
others can we entirely fulfil our true self-being.\(^3\)

Of these two truths mankind has had some vague vision in
the principle with regard to the individual, though it has made
only a very poor and fragmentary attempt to regard them in
practice and in nine-tenths of its life has been busy departing
from them — even where it outwardly professed something of
the law. But they apply not only to the individual but to the
nation. Here was the first error of the German subjectivism.
Reasoning of the Absolute and the individual and the universal,
it looked into itself and saw that in fact, as a matter of life,
That seemed to express itself as the ego and, reasoning from the
conclusions of modern Science, it saw the individual merely as
a cell of the collective ego. This collective ego was, then, the
greatest actual organised expression of life and to that all ought
to be subservient, for so could Nature and its evolution best
be assisted and affirmed. The greater human collectivity exists,
but it is an inchoate and unorganised existence, and its growth
can best be developed by the better development of the most
efficient organised collective life already existing; practically,
then, by the growth, perfection and domination of the most
advanced nations, or possibly of the one most advanced nation,
the collective ego which has best realised the purpose of Nature
and whose victory and rule is therefore the will of God. For all
organised lives, all self-conscious egos are in a state of war, some-
times overt, sometimes covert, sometimes complete, sometimes
partial, and by the survival of the best is secured the highest
advance of the race. And where was the best, which was the
most advanced, self-realising, efficient, highest-cultured nation,

\(^2\) *vyaśti* and *samaśti*.

\(^3\) There is another side of the truth in which this interdependence is not so imperative,
but that is a phenomenon of spiritual evolution which has nothing to do with the present
subject.
if not, by common admission as well as in Germany’s own self-vision, Germany itself? To fulfil then the collective German ego and secure its growth and domination was at once the right law of reason, the supreme good of humanity and the mission of the great and supreme Teutonic race.  

From this egoistic self-vision flowed a number of logical consequences, each in itself a separate subjective error. First, since the individual is only a cell of the collectivity, his life must be entirely subservient to the efficient life of the nation. He must be made efficient indeed,—the nation should see to his education, proper living, disciplined life, carefully trained and subordinated activity,—but as a part of the machine or a disciplined instrument of the national Life. Initiative must be the collectivity’s, execution the individual’s. But where was that vague thing, the collectivity, and how could it express itself not only as a self-conscious, but an organised and efficient collective will and self-directing energy? The State, there was the secret. Let the State be perfect, dominant, all-pervading, all-seeing, all-effecting; so only could the collective ego be concentrated, find itself, and its life be brought to the highest pitch of strength, organisation and efficiency. Thus Germany founded and established the growing modern error of the cult of the State and the growing subordination driving in the end towards the effacement of the individual. We can see what it gained, an immense collective power and a certain kind of perfection and scientific adjustment of means to end and a high general level of economic, intellectual and social efficiency,—apart from the tremendous momentary force which the luminous fulfilment of a great idea gives to man or nation. What it had begun to lose is as yet only slightly apparent,—all that deeper life, vision, intuitive power, force of personality, psychical sweetness and largeness which the free individual brings as his gift to the race.

Secondly, since the State is supreme, the representative of the
Divine or the highest realised functioning of human existence, and has a divine right to the obedience, the unquestioning service and the whole activity of the individual, the service of State and community is the only absolute rule of morality. Within the State this may include and sanction all other moral rules because there no rebel egoism can be allowed, for the individual ego must be lost in that of the State or become part of it and all condition of covert or overt war must be abrogated in obedience to the collective good as determined by the collective will. But in relation to other States, to other collective egos the general condition, the effective law is still that of war, of strife between sharply divided egoisms each seeking to fulfil itself, each hampered and restricted in its field by the others. War then is the whole business of the State in its relation to other States, a war of arms, a war of commerce, a war of ideas and cultures, a war of collective personalities each seeking to possess the world or at least to dominate and be first in the world. Here there can enter no morality except that of success, though the pretence of morality may be a useful stratagem of war. To serve the State, the German collectivity which is his greater and real self is the business of the German individual whether at home or abroad, and to that end everything which succeeds is justifiable. Inefficiency, incompetence, failure are the only immorality. In war every method is justified which leads to the military success of the State, in peace every method which prepares it; for peace between nations is only a covert state of war. And as war is the means of physical survival and domination, so commerce is the means of economic survival and domination; it is in fact only another kind of war, another department of the struggle to live, one physical, the other vital. And the life and the body are, so Science has assured us, the whole of existence.

Thirdly, since the survival of the best is the highest good of mankind and the survival of the best is secured by the elimination of the unfit and the assimilation of the less fit, the conquest of the world by German culture is the straight path of human progress. But culture is not, in this view, merely a state of knowledge or a system or cast of ideas and moral and aesthetic tendencies;
culture is life governed by ideas, but by ideas based on the truths of life and so organised as to bring it to its highest efficiency. Therefore all life not capable of this culture and this efficiency must be eliminated or trodden down, all life capable of it but not actually reaching to it must be taken up and assimilated. But capacity is always a matter of genus and species and in humanity a matter of race. Logically, then, the Teutonic\(^5\) race is alone entirely capable, and therefore all Teutonic races must be taken into Germany and become part of the German collectivity; races less capable but not wholly unfit must be Germanised; others, hopelessly decadent like the Latins of Europe and America or naturally inferior like the vast majority of the Africans and Asiatics, must be replaced where possible, like the Hereros, or, where not possible, dominated, exploited and treated according to their inferiority. So evolution would advance, so the human race grow towards its perfection.\(^6\)

We need not suppose that all Germany thought in this strenuous fashion, as it was too long represented, or that the majority thought thus consciously; but it is sufficient that an energetic minority of thinkers and strong personalities should seize upon the national life and impress certain tendencies upon it for these to prevail practically or at the least to give a general trend subconsciously even where the thought itself is not actually proposed in the conscious mind. And the actual events of the present hour seem to show that it was this gospel that partly consciously, partly subconsciously or half articulately had taken possession of the collective German mind. It is easy to deride the rigidity of this terrible logic or riddle it with the ideas and truths it has ignored, and it is still easier to abhor, fear, hate and spew at it while practically following its principles in our own action with less openness, thoroughness and courage. But it is more profitable to begin by seeing that behind it there was and is a tremendous sincerity which is the secret of its force, and a

\(^5\) “Nordic” is now the established term.

\(^6\) This was written more than thirty years ago, but later developments have emphasised and brought out the truth of the description which was indeed much less apparent then.
sort of perverse honesty in its errors; the sincerity which tries to look straight at one’s own conduct and the facts of life and the honesty to proclaim the real principles of that conduct and not — except as an occasional diplomacy — profess others with the lips while disregarding them in the practice. And if this ideal is to be defeated not merely for a time in the battle-field and in the collective person of the nation or nations professing it, as happened abortively in the War, but in the mind of man and in the life of the human race, an equal sincerity and a less perverse honesty has to be practised by those who have arrived at a better law.

The German gospel has evidently two sides, the internal and the external, the cult of the State, nation or community and the cult of international egoism. In the first, Germany, even if for a time entirely crushed in the battle-field, seems to have already secured the victory in the moral sense of the human race. The unsparing compulsion as against the assistance of the individual by the State\(^7\) — for his and the common good, of course, but who professes to compel for harm? — is almost everywhere either dominant or else growing into a strong and prevailing current of opinion; the champions of individual freedom are now a morally defeated and dwindling army who can only fight on in the hope of a future reaction or of saving something of their principle from the wreck. On the external side, the international, the battle of ideas still goes on, but there were from the beginning ominous signs;\(^8\) and now after the physical war with its first psychological results is well over, we are already able to see in which direction the tide is likely to flow. War is a dangerous teacher and physical victory leads often to a moral defeat. Germany, defeated in the war, has won in the after war; the German gospel rearisen in a sterner and fiercer avatar threatens to sweep over all Europe.

\(^7\) Not always in the form of Socialism, Bolshevik Communism or Fascism. Other forms of government that are nominally based on the principles of individualistic democracy and freedom have begun to follow the same trend under the disguise or the mere profession of its opposite.

\(^8\) The League of Nations was at no time a contrary sign. Whatever incidental or temporary good it might achieve, it could only be an instrument for the domination of the rest of the earth by Europe and of all by two or three major nations.
It is necessary, if we are not to deceive ourselves, to note that even in this field what Germany has done is to systematise certain strong actual tendencies and principles of international action to the exclusion of all that either professed to resist or did actually modify them. If a sacred egoism — and the expression did not come from Teutonic lips — is to govern international relations, then it is difficult to deny the force of the German position. The theory of inferior and decadent races was loudly proclaimed by other than German thinkers and has governed, with whatever assuaging scruples, the general practice of military domination and commercial exploitation of the weak by the strong; all that Germany has done is to attempt to give it a wider extension and more rigorous execution and apply it to European as well as to Asiatic and African peoples. Even the severity or brutality of her military methods or of her ways of colonial or internal political repression, taken at their worst, for much once stated against her has been proved and admitted to be deliberate lies manufactured by her enemies, was only a crystallising of certain recent tendencies towards the revival of ancient and mediaeval hardheartedness in the race. The use and even the justification of massacre and atrocious cruelty in war on the ground of military exigency and in the course of commercial exploitation or in the repression of revolt and disorder has been quite recently witnessed in the other continents, to say nothing of certain outskirts of Europe. From one point of view, it is well that terrible examples of the utmost logic of these things should be prominently forced on the attention of mankind; for by showing the evil stripped of all veils the choice between good and evil instead of a halting between the two will be forced on the human conscience. Woe to the race if it blinds its conscience and buttresses up its animal egoism with the old justifications; for the gods have shown that Karma is not a jest.

But the whole root of the German error lies in its mistaking life and the body for the self. It has been said that this gospel

9 Witness Egypt, Ireland, India, and afterwards Abyssinia, Spain, China — wherever still man tries to dominate by force over man or nation over nation.
is simply a reversion to the ancient barbarism of the religion of Odin; but this is not the truth. It is a new and a modern gospel born of the application of a metaphysical logic to the conclusions of materialistic Science, of a philosophic subjectivism to the objective pragmatic positivism of recent thought. Just as Germany applied the individualistic position to the realisation of her communal subjective existence, so she applied the materialistic and vitalistic thought of recent times and equipped it with a subjective philosophy. Thus she arrived at a bastard creed, an objective subjectivism which is miles apart from the true goal of a subjective age. To show the error it is necessary to see wherein lies the true individuality of man and of the nation. It lies not in its physical, economic, even its cultural life which are only means and adjuncts, but in something deeper whose roots are not in the ego, but in a Self one in difference which relates the good of each, on a footing of equality and not of strife and domination, to the good of the rest of the world.