

## Chapter 4

# Activism and Speculation: Nazism, Communism, and Existentialism

BETWEEN 1910 and 1923, Vienna was the place where many significant movements were plotted. Some of them became historical, and it is worthwhile to go back and to discuss their origins in terms of my experiences during those years. Nazism, communism, and existentialism had their underground beginnings between 1909 and 1913. In the war years, most political and social movements subsided, subordinated to the war effort, only to explode on the surface between 1919 and 1923.

Adolf Hitler came to Vienna to study art. His father had thrown him out of their home in Braunau on the Danube. The art school rejected him. In order to support himself, he used to go to the Vienna parks and paint scenes on postcards which he then sold to tourists for a few pfennigs. He seemed poverty-stricken, dressed like a tramp. I learned that he was living in a flophouse.

One day after one of my storytelling sessions in the park, Hitler, Schickelgrüber then, came up to me and shook my hand. We introduced ourselves, and he told me that he had enjoyed the session. He had no particular distinction but had an enthusiastic spirit.

Years later, in 1921, our *Stegreiftheater* troop was touring Germany. After our demonstration in Munich, a young university student invited me to come and see a group of revolutionary workers in the *Brauhaus* he frequented. Hitler was on the platform exhorting his listeners to their future glory.

As far as I could see, Hitler was just another nationalist with a following among the factory workers. He was the same enthusiast I had met in the park, but still not particularly distinctive. Hitler had left Vienna in May

1913. His National Socialist movement was anticipated by many years in the activities of the Germanic nationalists and anti-Semites which became more intense, more outspoken, and better organized every year. I grew up in that atmosphere, and, luckily for me and my family, I was very sensitive to it.

At the University of Vienna, there were numerous clashes between nationalist students and Zionist students, followers of Theodor Herzl. One morning when I tried to make my way to the university, I found the Ringstrasse blocked by a cordon of police on horseback and on foot. No one was permitted to pass. The nationalists had given notice to the rector and to the deans of university departments, as well as to all the other students, that Jews would no longer be permitted to participate in classes. Neither would Jews be allowed into the university's precincts. Should a Jew attempt to enter, he was beaten up and thrown out. The *Deutsche Volkstudenten* had placed their guards at every entrance, all around the university, at every window on the upper floors, in front of every classroom door. The occupation of the university led to a meeting of the rector with all the deans and faculty members. They decided to close the university.

Even though the university was closed, Jewish students, in blocks of 10 to 20, tried to force entry. The nationalists counterattacked with their fists, with sticks, and even knives. The casualties were heavy and severe, with the Jews taking the brunt of the fighting. Day after day I went to school, but the situation stayed the same. Bloody, vicious battles went on. The university stayed closed. Many members of the faculty were nationalists themselves. The police department of Vienna was controlled by the notorious anti-Semite, Burgermeister Lueger. Actually, Jewish students were only a small percentage of the student body. Later I found out that the original cause of the unrest was a fist fight between a Jewish boy and a German nationalist student in which the Jew had given the nationalist a bad beating.

The University of Vienna, a world center for scholars, especially renowned for its faculties of medicine and science institutes, was a shambles. Every effort at reconciliation failed. I tried to mediate the dispute for a time. I held a position of leadership in the university community. My seemingly mysterious religious, prophetic activities and my group of disciples gave me an unusual status. I was an outsider to the political wars that had ravaged the university. No one really knew who I was. The nationalists thought I was German; the Jews thought I was Jewish; no one really knew. . . .

Leon Trotsky was in Vienna many times in the years preceding the Russian Revolution, as were many of the other leaders of the Bolshevik movement. Vienna had a large contingent of Russian immigrants. Trot-

sky occupied the basement in the same building we rented for the children's theater. We moved the work in the park indoors in the winter. Every evening he held gatherings of students and workers, among whom he tried to spread his message.

One evening he saw me coming to the theater with a group of children. In marked contrast to his usual manner of highfalutin tirade, he said to me, "Politics is the greatest of all sciences."

"Maybe," I replied, "but how do you start? It seems to me that before we can get to politics we must do something else. Here we are, face to face, but the distance between us is appallingly great. It appears to me to be greater than the distance between us and that shining star above us, millions of light-years away. How can we cross the bridge between you and me?"

There were communist and socialist groups at the university while I was there. Like the other groups, they engaged in demonstrations, celebrations, and fist fights. At the university, the big thing was to control the large entrance hall, and all of the political groups were involved in a constant jockeying for power to see who could take over that hall.

The third significant movement during those days with which I associated myself was existentialism. The early existentialists were few, easily identified by the beards they wore. The beard was the sign by which they were recognized and by which they could recognize one another. It was a symbol of natural manhood and a challenge to the bourgeois and the communists alike, as something which grows in its own way and does not stand still. It was, therefore, the symbol of one's freedom to *be*. . . .

The principles of the three movements were clear. The Nazis proposed to conquer the world for the Germans so they could rule it. The communists wanted to conquer the world for the working class. The early existentialists emphasized, in contrast, existence itself as something sacred. They already had the world. They did not have to conquer it. Whenever they saw existence threatened, they tried to restore it in its native form against the invasion of the robot. . . .

The first principle of this group was the "all-inclusiveness" of being and the constant effort to maintain from moment to moment the natural, spontaneous, uninterrupted flow of existence. No moment could be bypassed because every moment was in the being. No part could be left out because every part was a part of the being and there was no other being. Their second principle was goodness, the natural blessedness of all existing things. There were the idea of the "moment" (*Augenblick*), neither as a function of the past nor of the future, but as a category in itself; the idea of the "situation" (*Lage*) and the challenges emerging from it; the ideas of spontaneity and creativity as universal processes of conduct, counter-

ing the clichés of the ethical and cultural conserves; and above all the idea of urgency, the urgency of their immediate experience. . . .

One afternoon in 1913, I walked through the Praterstrasse after a session with the children. I met a pretty girl who smiled at me. She wore a striking red skirt and a white blouse decorated with red ribbons to match her skirt. I had scarcely begun talking to her when a policeman came between us and took her away. Outrage and shock prompted me to follow the pair to the police station and to wait for the girl to come out. When she emerged, I asked her what had happened. She told me, "The police said that we are not permitted to wear such striking clothes during the day because we might attract customers. It is only after sundown that we are allowed to do so."

My compassion was aroused. I was not conscious of any sexual motives, but rather of a profound anger and resentment at the abuse of these women by the little gods at the police station.

Vienna's red-light district, a ghetto for prostitutes, was in [the] first borough, located in the famous Am Spittelberg. Here was an entire class of people segregated from the rest of society, not because of their religion or ethnic character, but because of their occupation. They were unacceptable to the bourgeois, the Marxists, even the criminals. The criminal, after serving his prison sentence, is again a free agent. But these women were eternally lost. They had no civil rights. There were no laws, or even social mechanisms, for protecting their interests.

I began to visit their houses, accompanied by a physician, Dr. Wilhelm Gruen, a specialist in venereal diseases, and Carl Colbert, the publisher of a Vienna newspaper, *Der Morgen*. Our visits were not motivated by any desire to reform the girls, nor to analyze them. The girls were suspicious of us at first because the Catholic Charities in Vienna had frequently tried to intervene in their lives. Nor was I looking for the "charismatic prostitute" among them. She is the creature of a social worker's fantasy: a strong, attractive woman who could be induced to change her ways and to lead her sisters out of lives of corruption.

I had in mind what LaSalle and Marx had done for the working class, ideology aside. They made the workers respectable by giving them a sense of dignity; they organized them into labor unions, which raised the status of the entire class. Aside from the anticipated economic benefits to the workers, this organizational activity was accompanied by ethical achievements. I had in mind that something similar could be done for the prostitutes. I suspected, to begin with, that the "therapeutic" aspect would be far more important here than the economic because the prostitutes had been stigmatized for so long as despicable sinners and unworthy people that they had come to accept this as an unalterable fact. It was easier to

help the working class. Although manual labor had been and still is considered by some people as a vulgar status, it was still comparatively easy to give it, with the aid of skillful propaganda, the emblems of service and dignity.

But we were optimistic and started to meet groups of 8 to 10 girls two or three times a week in their houses. It was during the afternoon when the Viennese had what is called *Jauze*, a counterpart to the British afternoon tea. Coffee and cake were served, and we sat around a table. The conferences, at first, simply dealt with everyday incidents which the girls experienced: being arrested, being harassed by a policeman for wearing provocative clothing, being jailed because of false accusations from a client, having venereal disease but being unable to get treatment, becoming pregnant and giving birth to a baby and having to hide the child under an assumed name in a foster home, and having to hide the mother's identity from the child, just being a beloved "aunt." At first the women were fearful of persecution and opened up very slowly. But when they began to see the purpose of the group and that it was to their benefit, they warmed up and became quite open.

The first results we noticed were rather mechanical. For instance, we were able to find a lawyer who would represent them in court. We found a doctor to treat them and a hospital to admit them as patients. Gradually they came to recognize the deeper value of the meetings. It became possible for them to help one another. The girls volunteered to contribute a small amount of money each week towards the expenses of the meetings and to start a savings account for emergencies.

At the end of 1913, the prostitutes held a mass meeting in one of the largest halls in Vienna, the Sofiensaal. By this time, there was a real organization with elected officers. They led the meeting. Dr. Gruen and Mr. Colbert were up on the dais. I was there only as a "civilian" and stayed in the audience. The girls were very proud of themselves that night.

In the end, it turned into a wild affair. There was a conflict between pimps and prostitutes. The police finally forced their way into the hall and broke up the meeting.

From the outside, it looked as if we had "unionized" prostitutes. Actually, it was one of my early efforts at applying group therapy to one of the most difficult of human problems, that of prostitution. . . .

I wrote on page 1 of my diary, "God is Spontaneity." On page 2, "If there is a God, He must be a mathematician," and then, "The mathematics of the universe must extend to the social universe. A sociometry must be possible." But the question was, and still is, how can spontaneity, which is so elusive and contradictory to the idea of constancy, the basis of most physical science, ever be caught in the network of measurement and

prediction? It seemed to be an insoluble paradox. I had worried over it for a long time, ever since I had envisioned the Godhead as the protagonist of the universe and made the first sociogram, the sociogram of the Godhead.

The advent of sociometry cannot be understood without appraising my presociometric background vis-à-vis the historical-ideological setting of the Western world before, during, and after the First World War. Marxism and psychoanalysis, the two opposites, had each spent their theoretic bolt: Marxism with Lenin's *State and Revolution*, psychoanalysis with Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Nationalism did not have any rigorous theoretical basis but was, rather, an attitude, an emotional state of reaction to Marxism, psychoanalytic theory, and the stresses of the twentieth century. Marxism and Freudianism had one thing in common: they both rejected religion, disavowing the idea of a community based on spontaneous love, unselfishness, and sainthood, on positive goodness, and on naive cooperativeness. I took a position contrary to the Freudians and the Marxists both, the side of positive religion. The fact that Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and the other religions of the past have had limited success did not prove that the concept of religion itself had failed. My contention was that religion had to be tried again, a religion of a new sort, its inspirations modified and its techniques improved by the insights which science has given us, by no means excluding some of the insights brought forth by Marxism and Freudianism. My position was threefold:

1. Spontaneity and creativity are the propelling forces in human progress, beyond and independent of libido and socioeconomic motives [that] are frequently interwoven with spontaneity-creativity, but [this proposition] does deny that spontaneity and creativity are merely a function and derivative of libido or socioeconomic motives.

2. Love and mutual sharing are powerful, indispensable working principles in group life. Therefore, it is imperative that we have faith in our fellow man's intentions, a faith which transcends mere obedience arising from physical and legalistic coercion.

3. That a superdynamic community based upon these principles can be brought to realization through new techniques. . . .

My purposes were first expressed in the creation of the religion of the encounter with my friend Chaim Kellmer. After the First World War, I wrote *The Philosophy of the Here and Now* and *The Words of the Father*, which state my religious position. I have never abandoned it.

My philosophy has been misunderstood. It has been disregarded in many religious *and* scientific circles. This has not hindered me from continuing to develop techniques whereby my vision of what the world could be might be established in fact. It is curious that these techniques—sociom-

etry, psychodrama, group therapy—created to implement an underlying philosophy of life have been almost universally accepted while the underlying philosophy has been relegated to the dark corners of library shelves or entirely pushed aside.

There is a simple explanation for this. It has been generally accepted that a scientist may have two compartments, one for his religion and the other for his science, as long as the scientist is, like Copernicus, Newton, Kepler, Mendel, or Darwin, a physicist, a chemist, or a biologist. But there is a profound bias against social scientists having two compartments. However, the two compartments can be kept apart. Indeed, one is able to do conscientious screening and not let one activity interfere with the other. In short, the social scientist indulges in role playing. It must be added that the positive religion which I offered was just as much in contradiction and opposition to the official religions of the time as it was to the agnostic psychological and political doctrines current then. I consider that the religious tenets I have always held, when removed from their metaphoric shell, contain the most revolutionary kernel of all my work.

I arrived at the conclusion that the next necessary step was the further realization and concretization of my ideas in the flesh, rather than in further intellectual extension. Therefore, I continued to become a psychodramatist, and a role player. Systems analysis of the cultures of the past and declarations about what should be done tomorrow were anticlimactic. Book writing has become a worldwide obsession. From the point of view of a creative revolution, the book is a symbol of reaction, not so much in terms of its contents but because of the book's form as the conservator of creative behavior. Would God start the world by writing a book? Did He start the creation of the universe by writing Genesis? What comes first? How would God behave if He were to create the world again? . . .

The genesis of the Godhead fertilized another idea in my mind. God was not just a godplayer in the literal sense. Had God been only God, a Narcissus in love with Himself and with His own expansion, the universe would never have come into existence. It is because He became a "lover" and a "creator" that He was able to create the world. If God came into the world again, He would not be incarnated as an individual, but as a *group*, a collective. . . . What picture of the universe did He have on the first day of creation?

I felt that one of the first blueprints might have been a universal axio-normative order of the cosmos. Accordingly, I formulated two hypotheses:

1. The *spatial-proximity* hypothesis postulates that the nearer two individuals are to each other in space, the more they owe their immediate attention and acceptance, their first priority of love, to one another. The prescription would be: Do not pay any attention to the individuals farther

away from you unless you have already fulfilled your responsibility to the nearer ones, and they to you. By the "nearer" is meant the one who lives closest to you, the one you meet first on the street, the one you find working next to you, the one sitting next to you, the one who is introduced to you first. The sequence of "proximity" in space establishes a precise order of social bonds and acceptance; the sequence of giving love and attention is thus strictly preordained and prearranged according to a spatial imperative.

2. The *temporal-proximity* hypothesis postulates that the sequence of proximity in time establishes a precise order of social attention and veneration according to a "temporal imperative"; in other words, the here and now demands help first, the next in time to the here and now, backward or forward, requires help or attention next.

With these two hypotheses, I had some of the ingredients of the sociometric system: the idea of proximity and the metric, the love of the neighbor and the idea of the meeting, in addition to the factors of spontaneity and creativity. I cast God as a super sociometrist, imposing His system on the cosmos. As my speculations about the Godhead and my projections of His character deepened, I began to see God, not only the One who assigned some of His spontaneity and creativity to every particle of the universe, but as One, who by so doing, created for Himself innumerable oppositions, the counter spontaneities of innumerable beings. Thus He made Himself dependent upon every being, and because of the enormous distribution of His spontaneity and creativity through endless space, *almost helpless*. But, by the same token, it made us and all beings far more dependent upon Him than we would have been had we not a share in some of His initiative and responsibility. The distribution of His spontaneity and creativity made Him a partner and equal. He was to serve, not to rule. He was to coexist, cocreate, and coproduce. This model of the Godhead, the "objective eye of God," was an excellent basis from which the sociometric investigator could build. . . .