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TURGOT'S PROGRESS

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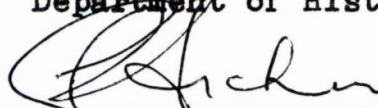
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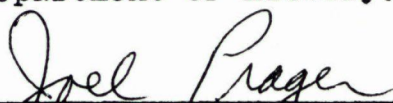
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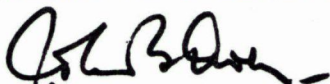
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Abstract.

Because Ann Robert Jacques Turgot was both a practical and an intellectual reformer, his career, better than almost any other, reveals the role ideals played in the philosophes' crusade to enlighten and change Frenchmen. The most frequently restated thesis about the eighteenth-century Enlightenment would have it that an intellectual like Turgot was able to step back from his environment, analyze it rationally and scientifically, and proceed to change it equally rationally. Turgot was not able to remain so detached. The very radical way in which he understood his position as an administrator made it necessary for him to justify himself. Turgot was more than a social scientist because he sought an authoritative reason for existence which would lend the weight of moral conviction to the reasonable reforms he felt he was destined to make.

Turgot convinced himself that sweeping reforms were justified with the idea of progress, which was a system of revelation parallel in structure and in the role it played in his thought to the traditional Christian outlook. With him, progress was a historical theodicy full of revealed meanings. The idea of progress was an emotional, as well as an ideological self-justification; adhering to it by faith, he was able to rationalize a deeply emotional alienation from his society.

The revelation of progress and Turgot's reforming activities

were inseparable because he assimilated his specific reform programs into the framework of his ideology. He concluded that the statesman's duty was to teach the lessons of progress to those he ruled and to the rulers he assisted. This notion of pedantic government was crippling; he blinded himself to the shifting demands of practical politics. And he developed a sophisticated economic theory to explain what changes had to be made and why. He reworked his revelation to make it the history of progressive economic everyman; thus his projected economic reforms acquired moral sanction. Because of this emphasis on economics, a marxist interpretation of Turgot's career is attractive. It is only partly applicable. Turgot tried to act on the basis of his ideas: he recognized his was an increasingly bourgeois society; this he did not like. He tried to eliminate all possibility of a society divided between a privileged few and an underprivileged mass by writing an industrial utopia and a social contract into the Six Edicts for which he is most widely known.

In conclusion, Turgot was not able to conceive of reforms without reference to a closed and frequently dogmatic system which he developed to give moral and metaphysical meaning and purpose to his life, and which he adhered to irrationally, by faith. He identified so completely with his system at such a deeply emotional level that he was able to doubt its "scientific" veracity only once, and that only during a time of severe strain at the end of his Intendancy of Limoges.

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Abbreviation.

Turgot, A.R.J. Oeuvres et documents le concernant,
ed. Schelle, 5 Vols. (Paris, Alcan, 1913-23), will be cited
as Turgot, Oeuvres.

Chapter 1. The Vocation of Reform.

By his combination of the theory and practice of intellectual and political reform, Ann Robert Jacques Turgot became one of the most famous figures of the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment. His career reached a climax in 1774-6, when for twenty months he played out a famous drama on a national stage as Contrôleur Général of the French finances. He attempted to implement ideas and reforms which would only be fully applied during and after the Revolution of 1789. Voltaire, the foremost philosophe of them all, summarized all the hopes he represented with an epistle in verse, written after Turgot was dismissed.

Benevolent philosophe, citizen minister
 Who strives only for the truth and to do right,
 Who to a thoughtless, perhaps too often ungrateful people,
 Would bring happiness....
 The only true fruit of labour is to live in peace.¹

In this Voltaire expressed the sense of resignation to harsh duty, the feeling of isolation and frustration, and the sense of failure which had led Turgot to try to force uncompromizing, virtually revolutionary reforms on a troubled, hostile population. Turgot, said Voltaire, ought to retire. He ought to congratulate himself; he had at least tried. Turgot had become a symbol and a legend.

Schelle, the most recent editor of Turgot's works,

¹Quoted in Turgot, Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 471-2.

concluded his Vie de Turgot with a comment with which anyone who has read the Oeuvres can readily agree: "In the mass of papers which have passed before me, printed or in manuscript, I have not seen even one which was of such a nature as to detract from the honor of the man and the glory of his conduct. Unity is in all his acts as in all his writings, in his public life as in his private life."¹

This unity, stature and consistency was only achieved with great personal effort. Turgot's biography encompasses half a century of rapid change; his life story reveals all the conflicts characteristic of eighteenth-century French history. He was born in 1727. He died fifty-four years later, in 1781. He graduated from the Sorbonne in 1750. Prepared for the priesthood by his education, destined to be a Churchman by family command, he lifted himself out of his environment and background to become a philosophe and a secular administrator. After 1750 he worked ten years as a maître des requêtes in the Parlement of Paris. At the same time he wrote private drafts and published several articles that conflicted with the attitudes and traditions which the leaders of the Church and the parlements held should be applied in France. He wrote four articles for the Encyclopédie, which was banned by the censor and the Parlement of Paris in 1751. In 1751 he left Paris for Limoges, where he was Intendant for thirteen years. There

¹ibid., p. 25.

he continued to write, especially works on economic theory. All his life, with practical reforms and intellectual theory, he tried point by point to change and refute the traditions and ideas underlying French government and society. He forced himself to step back from his environment, analyze it and try to change it.

Turgot's career can be interpreted in many ways. Except in the realm of economic thought his intellectual production was rarely original, and even there he was overshadowed by his contemporary, Adam Smith. Yet this very lack of originality, coupled with an unusual ability to articulate the doctrines and assumptions of the philosophes, makes Turgot one of the best representatives of eighteenth-century thought. His aphorisms and summaries are frequently cited in general histories of the Enlightenment to clarify some of the central doctrines of the philosophes. He is as frequently cited in political and economic histories of the eighteenth century. He was intimately involved in the workings of French government and society at all levels. As an Intendant he was in the first rank of those trying to solve the problems of economic, social and political instability which led to the revolution. This thesis will look at Turgot both for his ideas and role as a reformer. His career is a special case: it affords an opportunity to study a frequently neglected aspect of eighteenth-century France. Ideas were changing. The social and political and economic circumstances of life were changing. There

was a relationship between the idealized reformation the philosophes tried to begin, and the realities which led them to try to convince Frenchmen that both intellectual and practical reforms were necessary. Intellectual and practical changes were not isolated; they were interdependent. Because Turgot was both a practical and intellectual reformer, his career, better than almost any other, reveals the role ideals played in the philosophes' crusade to enlighten and change Frenchmen.

Despite the excellent collection of documents, letters, and published works assembled by Schelle, not much work has been done on Turgot. His biographers, Léon Say, Dakin, and most recently, Gignoux,¹ have focused primarily on his administrative career. To some extent Say and Dakin attempted to describe his ideas. However, they failed to grasp their significance and were unable to define most of them clearly because they envisioned Turgot's career in his own terms. Reading them is like reading Turgot himself: Say captured the drama of Turgot in his private correspondence and Dakin presented his public image, Turgot the cool, progressive, professional public servant. For both of them Turgot remained the embodiment of all the liberal hopes of the eighteenth century and the real founder of political economy in France. To them his was the only rational way

¹Say, Turgot (Paris, Hachette, 1887); Dakin, Turgot and the Ancien Régime in France (New York, Octagon, 1965); C-J. Gignoux, Turgot (Paris, Fayard, 1945).

of looking at the world; he was martyred by the philistines who stood in the way of progress. Gignoux's is the most detached biography, but it is not as thorough as Dakin's. And Gignoux has simply dismissed most of Turgot's ideas as unfortunate, quaint, or misguided.¹ As a result, his understanding of Turgot remains necessarily incomplete, and his evaluation of Turgot's career only partial.

It would hardly be satisfactory to turn away from Turgot's biographers completely and concentrate only on his ideas. While he can not be understood apart from the intellectual history of the eighteenth century, neither can his ideas be understood apart from their social, political and economic context. The approach typical of the "history of ideas" school of historical interpretation is inadequate.² This approach is not of much use except as it tries to establish an accurate reading of the texts of representative intellectuals. In this kind of history, the issues discussed remain largely academic and of no real importance until they are put in the context of larger problems. Intellectual historians often fail to emphasize that the ideas which appear in print are put there by people, that people live historically and are to a great

¹op. cit., pp. 47-64.

²Mercier's vast encyclopedia of the theory of knowledge, idea of morality, psychology, and the ideas held by the philosophes concerning the purpose of the sciences and arts, La réhabilitation de la nature humaine (Villemonble, Éditions "la balance," 1960), is a foremost example of the production of the "history of ideas."

degree the product of their environment: ideas have to be understood as solutions to problems which have matured in the intellectuals' own lives, or in the groups with which the intellectuals are affiliated. Whatever significance Turgot's thought had in terms of the conventional problems of philosophy, it was secondary and only derivative from his more general concern with the immediate problems of reform in eighteenth-century France.

Turgot is often cited and is implicitly included in what is perhaps the most frequently restated thesis about the Enlightenment.¹ The philosophes are represented as being thoroughly self-critical, free of belief in anything but the results of careful, non-metaphysical and unemotional evaluation of all things human. They continually reexamined their own assumptions and premises as well as those of their adversaries. The philosophes are said to have been chiefly in combat with a visible esprit de système characteristic of their opponents, the religionists. They replaced this typically credulous, emotional and metaphysically inclined esprit de système with a "systematic mind" that criticized everything, yet did not criticize from the point of view of any coherent system except that provided by the most general principles of the scientific method. It was a collective mind which did not operate on the basis of any integrated

¹For example, by Ernst Cassirer, who holds rigidly to the scheme outlined here, in his influential work, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Princeton, Princeton U.P., 1951), pp. 27, 200.

set of doctrines or irreducible dogmas. This "systematic mind" did not deduce principles which in application would lead to reforms of French society from any a priori, and certainly not from any irrational premises. As the philosophes put it, theirs was an intellect free of "prejudices." According to this thesis the philosophes evolved a world-view which was thoroughly rational, and which was based solely on empirical examination of the environment. It could have only evolved in a process of rational debate. This rationality was a new technique of thought which would enable those who possessed it to reconstruct life, to reform institutions and other minds in such a way as really to improve the basic human condition.

Hazard and Henri Sée are perhaps the foremost French advocates of this thesis. Far less qualified are the arguments of such prominent American writers as Gay and Cassirer. The philosophes, says Hazard, literally de-Christianized Europe. With traditional Christianity went the forces of irrationality, intolerance and social division, to be replaced, had the ideas of the philosophes only been fully implemented, by reason, tolerance and social harmony. But, and here is the main qualification to the argument, some aspects of Enlightenment thought bore within itself the seeds of a new irrationalism, romanticism and nationalism. Few, even among philosophes, were able to practice the ideals.¹ According to Sée, the philosophes

¹La pensée européenne au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Fayard, 1963), pp. 113, 269, 428, 429-32, 448-51.

began a genuine science of political and social criticism. But it was one which would be improved upon, and one that did after all contain potentially dogmatic elements.¹ In his second volume on the Enlightenment Gay argues that there really was progress, and that the development of the philosophes toward a fully rational outlook was its spearhead. He claims that Turgot and the philosophes refused to adopt a theory of progress and instead only retained the hope of its possibility; this was in itself a progressive step.² Cassirer's is perhaps the epitome of the outlook which in varying degree typifies the rest. The best eighteenth-century example he can find of his own thesis is D'Alembert's eulogy of science and the philosophes in his introduction to the Encyclopédie.³

That their doctrine was reason incarnate, and that their basic principles and ideas evolved in straightforward debate and empirical study were of course the beliefs of the philosophes themselves. But they believed much more than that. Their ideas went far beyond these somewhat vague affirmations of method. While he wrote articles for Diderot's Encyclopedie and while he was one of the philosophes' idols, Turgot nevertheless recognized the superficial understanding

¹L'évolution de la pensée politique en France au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Giard, 1925)

²The Enlightenment; An Interpretation (New York, Knopf, 1966-9), Vol. 2, pp. 98-125.

³Cassirer, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

of the processes of thought such a thesis involves. Shortly before he left the salons and intellectual circles of Paris to become an Intendant he wrote a eulogy of one of his mentors, Gournay. Gournay, Turgot noted, has been accused of being a man afflicted with a mind akin to the religionist esprit de système, along with the rest of the économistes, who in general have been targets for some philosophe abuse. But, he observed, this term has become a catch-all, an intellectual crutch, the oblivion to which one all too easily assigns people with whom one is unprepared or unable to argue. He concluded that the problem was whether or not a particular system of approach to problems was based on true assumptions and principles, and whether or not the answers a system offers are simply self-indulgent "prejudice": "every man who thinks has a system."¹

Turgot's own system both reflected and shaped his vocation of reformer. The key to understanding Turgot's politics and mind lies in the activism of his doctrine, for that was its central emphasis. The philosophes equated social science with social engineering. This activism was the most important factor distinguishing the philosophes from the traditional scholars and intellectuals of Catholic Christian France. The most absolute article of Turgot's faith was that change could and would have to take place. The philosophes felt their society was almost totally

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, p. 619.

unenlightened. Consequently, any change which was new and really different, any reform not arising out of religious and "feudal" premises, was by definition a rational or scientific change. They felt their society was so backward, their intellectual milieu so drowned in error, that the intent to change almost any aspect of the environment was rational. Turgot came to symbolize this feeling for the philosophes by combining theory and practice as an Intendant and as Contrôleur Général. An anonymous epigram attributed to Voltaire which was in wide circulation during Turgot's ministry expressed the heart of the philosophes' ambition.

In Turgot I believe firmly.
I do not know what he wants to do;
But by the grace of God, it is to the contrary
Of what has been done up to now.¹

Along with the rest of the philosophes Turgot was driven into this activism by complex, profound changes affecting religious and social understanding, economic practice, and social and political organization. He stepped back from his environment to try to analyze and change it. But he was too deeply involved in the changes typical of his society to make this a step into science; he was not merely a detached observer. Perhaps more than any other philosophe, Turgot lived out his career at the very centre of these changes. Much more than Voltaire or Diderot, who criticized much but were able to adjust to the system, more than a man like Helvétius, who as a tax farmer was part of the old

¹Quoted in Oeuvres, Vol. 5, p. 138.

ways, Turgot needed a clear sense of direction. As an Intendant, and later as a leader of the conseil d'état he was intimately involved in the dynamic and sometimes violent growth of a kind of institution which had very little meaning in traditional French political theory and practice. Turgot thought the King had to be an active legislator, the head of a state. As a professional bureaucrat he was in a potentially unusual and anomalous position. Instead of trying to adapt himself to the point where he could live in relative harmony with his contemporaries, he carried the implications of his position as a paid, professional and unprivileged administrator to their logical extreme.

For example, the King was known to be sovereign, but not the head of a state. The King was a sovereign Christian judge and the magistrate was his servant according to the laws and traditional practice. He was not a legislator, tax collector or administrator. Yet to maintain his territory and his authority the King needed an army, an efficient tax collection service, effective means to coerce recalcitrant subjects of all ranks, in short a regular, rational and continuing administration. Without an independent, professional administration he would have to return to the old system of hereditary vassalage and divided authority his predecessors had worked so hard to overcome. To Turgot such a prospect seemed very real. He felt he had to teach Louis XVI of his duties as much as he had to try to educate the magistrates and

such representatives of chaos as Maurepas and Miromesnil, his fellow ministers, lest the King lose all in a slide back into feudal chaos. Consequently he prefaced his most famous series of reforms with long, didactic preambles. He observed that his preambles to the Six Edicts were by association the King's own commitment, and that commitment on the King's part was more necessary than anything else. This was not a time to be detached; this was the world of human affairs, where detachment meant indifference.¹

The Intendants were the first recognizably modern civil servants. They formed a professional group of tax collectors and local policemen. They could not trace their origins farther back than the first third of the seventeenth century. As Turgot's experience was witness, they were only beginning to establish their administrative apparatus in any real terms in the countryside during the second half of the eighteenth century. In Limoges Turgot had to build his organization almost out of nothing. Then when he was Contrôleur Général he carefully had to supervise the Intendants themselves. Even they tended to remain powerless in the face of the hierarchy of privilege and exemption from all sorts of state obligations; sometimes they joined it.² The Intendants were afraid of Turgot, and extremely sensitive to any minor criticism which implied they were not fully committed to their functions as promoters of state

¹See ibid., p. 178.

²See, for example, ibid., pp. 330, 343-4.

interests. Because an Intendant had no traditional position to fall back to, and because he was at the mercy of his administrative superiors, because it was not his privilege, but instead his duty to collect taxes, dismissal could be easy and very serious. Unlike a magistrate, an Intendant had no place in the normal social and political sympathies of peasants and aristocrats. Exile or dismissal left him, as it left Turgot after 1776, isolated, powerless and suspect.

The conseil d'état was an even more anomalous institution. Founded in 1762, it took over duties which had previously belonged to various aristocratic members of the King's household. It supervised the Intendants and took over direction of the finances. The old offices remained, however, and people like Miromesnil, who was Turgot's most important enemy while he was Contrôleur Général, continued to represent traditional practices and offices. They did not do the real work, but they were not for that reason merely decorative. In practice the Contrôleur Général had to compete with other members of the household for the royal favor; for the conseil d'état, regardless of its modernity as an administrative cabinet, was still operated as the King's personal tool.

The Six Edicts of 1776 have become Turgot's most significant initial claim to historical notice. They deserve careful attention because they very clearly show that theory and practice were inseparable for Turgot; more important, they demonstrate how deeply Turgot was committed

to making fundamental changes in his society. They reveal how radical the position of a state servant was. The Six Edicts were opposed because they implied revolutionary changes.

Four of the acts, suppression of the remnants of the regulations governing grain movement into Paris, suppression of the offices at the Paris gates that administered those rules, and a pair of decrees which in effect abolished regulations and offices governing livestock movement and sales in Paris, were only the latest of similar laws decreed by various finance ministers during the second half of the eighteenth century. Two of the Six Edicts were innovations. They were of far reaching social and political significance; or at least they would have been of signal importance if Turgot and his program could have survived opposition.

The most disputed edict abolished road corvées throughout France. Turgot's fellow ministers for the most part opposed it. As the decrees were made public in the early months of 1776 abolition of the corvée met with severe remonstrances by the parlements. No one seriously objected to Turgot's claim that abolishing forced labour was humane. Few seriously objected to the argument that this reform would encourage the development of a more efficient working year for the agricultural labour force on which the obligation to work on the roads fell. Road work was required for a certain number of days of the year, and the government often

claimed these days during planting or harvest time, when the weather was good, and when field hands were most needed. Serious remonstrance centred around two corollaries which Turgot introduced into the rules set out in his edicts, one explicitly in law, the other implicitly in their preambles and in their general historical tendency.

First, he recognized that if the government was to continue to build a better transportation network without using forced labour it would have to find a way to pay the costs. His answer to this problem was to levy an annual proportional tax on the wealth of the nobility and clergy without any exemptions. This new levy was the first direct tax in French history ever to be imposed on the first and second estates which was not declared an emergency, temporary war measure. It struck at the very core of eighteenth-century French social and economic life, at the heart of the "fundamental laws" of which the parlements were so fond--at privilege. So did Turgot's second important decree, suppression of the jurandes, that is, the legal corporations required by ancient practice for regulation of many types of manufactures and commerce. But abolishing the guilds did not meet with so much unified opposition. They did not represent such a powerful interest as did the aristocracy and clergy. And intellectuals, many administrators, and probably a large proportion of French entrepreneurs had for a long time believed them to be inimical to economic development.

Second, Turgot's new laws implied an idea of government

which was very different from the notions of authority embodied in the traditions and laws of France. His was an idea few but professional philosophes as yet held. He asked Frenchmen to accept his radical measures in the name of a kind of government they could barely imagine. The magistrates in the Parlement of Paris, where the decrees had to be entered into the statutes adjudicated by the courts, called the decrees "usurpations"; from their point of view this was true. It was the avocat du Roi, Segulier, who publicly told the King he had absolutely no right to make such laws; the King had not the right to make laws at all. His rights and privileges stopped at upholding accepted practices. For all the magistrates in the parlements, for most of the King's ministers, for the King himself, monarchical power rested upon the laws of God as known by the Catholic Church and Christian judges. Monarchical power was the authority of a father, the strength of the head of a vast family. By his sense of responsibility, by his conscience, by his knowledge of the laws of God and their finality, the King was supposedly bound to obey and always respect the traditions manifest in the ancient usages and customary laws of France. The obligation was mutual. The subjects of the monarchy were in turn bound to respect and obey the King on the same grounds: the king was King by transcendent and traditional right; his subjects knew the King was authoritative and could command because their spiritual guardian, the Church, told them so. Miromesnil, Garde des

Sceaux, sent a memorandum to the King to refute Turgot's edicts as inexpedient and as contrary to all these old laws. Miromesnil concluded his own objections, and summed up the later remonstrances of the magistrates by alluding to the division, dispute and possible chaos which could come if Turgot's edicts were implemented. Minister and magistrate together recognized that much more was at stake than temporary injury of some economic interests and some political patronage. Said Miromesnil:

There are in France three great orders, the clergy, the nobility and the third estate. Each of these orders has its rights, its privileges, possibly its prejudices, but in the last analysis it is necessary to conserve them as they are. To weaken them is to risk weakening in the heart of the subjects the sentiment of interest and love which they must always have for the sovereign.¹

For Turgot, the state was a convenience; it had every right to make any law, so long as the law was useful. The degree of authority the state might claim over its citizens, he replied to Miromesnil, corresponded solely to its utility. The state has, he said, no transcendent sacred sanction, whether by tradition or by the laws of God known to the Church, or by both together. The value of its laws lies in the degree to which they keep state action within well defined

¹ Turgot, Oeuvres, Vol. 5, p. 193. As Garde des Sceaux, Miromesnil had to present the edicts to the Parlement of Paris at the lit de justice which had to be held to force their registration. He did so in the name of the King's paternal grace and traditional rights. See ibid., pp. 274-77. This was a phraseology and intent foreign to Turgot, and to the intent of the edicts, as the magistrates were well aware.

limits. Just laws ought not to have anything to do with religion. Religion is unchanging, and laws have to change. More important, rulers should not make a religion of social tradition. They should not lend artificial support to social traditions like customary tax exemptions by assuming the taxation of certain groups to be an irreverent usurpation, therefore immoral, inexpedient, and practically impossible. Any religious belief and any given tradition could easily be outdated, superfluous, useless and even harmful. The government does not satisfy the best interests of the greatest number by trying to maintain the profusion of practices and customs typical of any society at any point in history. Miromesnil says the King has to support a static, Christian status quo. That is not so. Instead, he continued, the state must build transportation networks which are too large and too costly for private enterprise, police these roads and the countryside to guarantee its citizens' persons and property against assault, and defend the society from outside attack. Social traditions and organization will grow and change of themselves to meet the just demands of new and changing interests. Where a tradition is an obstacle to satisfaction of interests, the state has to step in and remove it. Therefore, Turgot concluded, "the expenses of government having for their object the interest of all, all must contribute to them; and the more one enjoys the advantages of the society, the more one must hold oneself honored to pay the charges for them." Thus the magistrates

and the clergy have no right to object to the decrees, which will be useful.¹

Turgot's edicts implied the key ideas which had been the common coin of most of the philosophes for half a century. These ideas would be synthesized in a later act, The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen. These were the underlying generalizations about the just society that the Contrôleur Général intended to embody in the preambles and articles of the decrees: religious tolerance to the point of complete freedom of conscience, the notion that the state is essentially a policeman whose duty stops at the protection of private persons and property, the idea that individuals are bound together not by the emotional and transcendent sanctions of religion but by their mutual utility and consciousness of such, the tenet that social privilege does not have any sacred or final sanction and therefore that all people are equal before the law. Turgot intended the Six Edicts as only the first steps along the way to thorough reformation of French government.

Thus in order to promote state interest Turgot had to deal with ideas of government and conflicts of interest that went far beyond relatively simple problems of taxation and economic adjustment. The way he understood his position as an administrator put him far outside the traditional political and social norms of most Frenchmen. He acted on the basis of his ideas; this left him far outside the traditional

¹ibid., p. 183.

French social hierarchy. He presented himself with a harsh choice between betraying the institution he worked for and, as the magistrates ceaselessly told him, betraying the "fundamental laws." He was forced to justify himself. He needed and sought for a raison d'être grander and more final than his own interests might have required if he had not subordinated his personal interests and needs to what he thought were the needs of the institution he worked for.

Turgot did not come to his vocation by choice. He too had the weight of tradition on his shoulders. His was an old and dedicated political family, dependent for its fortunes upon the kings' developing interests. Turgot's father and grandfathers before him had been dedicated administrators and king's men. As prévôt des marchands Turgot's father had begun the last wall around Paris. He had constructed the royal revenue gates which his son would try to tear down in the name of the state. The Turgot family genealogy went back with certainty to at least 1500. It was a long and consistent line of noblesse du robe, of professional magistrates and public servants. As such they had extended the kings' justice and begun building the centralized authority based on a politically neutral state mechanism or set of functions which in time could and would function successfully, but only after a revolution.

Back in 1615 one of Turgot's ancestors, Claude Turgot, had dedicated a Traité de l'oeconomie politique to Louis XIII.

Ann Robert Jacques was well within the family tradition. Even when enrolled at the Sorbonne and preparing for the priesthood, he was already very much an eighteenth-century scientist. He applied the logic of secular reformation in his studies in biblical exegesis instead of the verbal techniques of scholastic logic. God, he noted, is useful and necessary to man. God is good only where he is useful. He is not good because supernatural and unknowable except by mystery. God's reason, he continued, like man's is sensible, just as sensible to man as man is sensible to God--for what is man but the image of God? Therefore a real proof of God's existence has to be empirical. The good which is God has to be known and verified in the forms of experience; if the forms of experience are not useful, if life is unpleasant and unhappy that only proves that chaos is powerful and that change has to be made lest all reason be lost. "Put God in the place of man," he wrote a fellow student; "the sense impressions are the book in which he instructs us; the illusions of the senses on the real presence are the fable contained in this book which must not make us doubt of the rest. This is not the greatest difficulty, to my mind, which is raised by the Eucharist."¹

Turgot concluded that beliefs that can permit of doubt must be reformed; for doubt can be ruinous and divisive; mere belief can be disputed, And dispute can lead to intolerance. Real truth should be self-evident, and

¹ Oeuvres, Vol. 1, p. 83.

easily assented to by all. Beliefs are potentially oppressive, while proven truths free the mind from both errors and troubling doubts. Turgot was having a great deal of trouble with traditional Christian revelation; it simply did not apply to his own situation and heritage. He found that his father, in demanding he become a priest, had placed him in a cruel position, as he could not be an orthodox priest except by some considerable hypocrisy. He had either to forget his familial duties and drop religion or combine both in a new revelation and a new purpose. Religion, he had concluded, could not be true unless it was secular and rational, applicable to measurable experience. All truth was derived from experience, he thought, but his own experience seemed to demonstrate that orthodox Christianity was not so final and ethically correct as it pretended to be. A world-view had to be as embracing as Christianity; otherwise life could easily lose all meaning. But he had stepped far beyond the pale of Christianity in this search for a genuine kind of knowledge. Most Catholic Christian belief was unreal to him. He did not find it illusory by choice. He wanted to believe but Catholicism's basic outlook was thoroughly out of joint with his own background.

Turgot was much more than a social scientist. Semi-consciously and partly emotionally he sought an authoritative reason for existence which would give the weight of moral conviction to the reasonable reforms he felt he was destined to make. Turgot wanted to change both the minds and practices

of Frenchmen. To change government practice, he found he had to change ideas of government. Theories of man and society, he discovered, were as much a part of reality as customs which exempted groups from obligations like taxation. People believed in traditions, and these beliefs were as much in need of reform as customs. Many harmful customs apparently were upheld on no more than the basis of simple belief. He felt from an early age that he was confronted with a vastly complex web of attitudes and practices which were all closely interrelated. A new and better web which allowed for change was necessary--one thoroughly different, but still coherent and systematic. Mind and environment were inseparable for him. His first arguments in favor of tolerance in the courts appeared soon after he tried to dispel the supernatural from the New Testament.¹ He found his justification in the idea of progress. He found he had to do more than stipulate how specific practices and beliefs should be changed; he had to explain to others, and especially to himself, why they should be changed at all, and why almost all of them should be systematically changed.

In the rest of this essay we shall see how Turgot used the idea of progress to convince himself that there was no alternative to the vocation of reform, and how thoroughly he identified with the theories he brought together to manufacture the revelation of progress. The next chapter will show how the idea of progress in Turgot's thought played

¹see ibid., p. 91.

a role analagous to the practical role traditional Christian revelation played in the minds of Churchmen. Chapter three will show that Turgot made no distinction between practical reform and its underlying theories, and that his theories were by no means a simple reflection of his social and political environment. He wanted to reconstruct French life, and not simply adjust it to new needs; an emerging bourgeois society did not "call forth" a bourgeois prophet. Altogether Turgot remade an admittedly complex and unpredictable world into a rational and in all cases reasonably explainable environment. He could not conceive of reforms outside a closed, very logical, yet frequently dogmatic system which he adhered to irrationally and uncritically. In conclusion we shall see that Turgot identified with his system at such a deeply personal and emotional level that he was able to doubt of its "scientific" veracity only once, and that only during a time of severe strain at the end of his Intendancy in Limoges.

Thus Turgot should be understood as a moralist, a crusading reformer and a prophet, and not as the embodiment of a purely rational outlook, philosophe and économiste though he was. On the other hand, Turgot's career should not be interpreted, as it has been by his biographers to date, through the perspective of the Six Edicts and the administrative activities plus the economic theory which led up to them. Viewed out of the context of his intellectual system they appear to be purely rational reforms.

He wrote his Six Edicts after a period of partial disillusionment. Frustrated by what seemed to be a hopeless and chaotic situation, he made his decrees frankly revolutionary measures, almost as if he sensed the coming Revolution, which would grow out of similar problems thirteen years later. Turgot never lost his sense of vocation. He synthesized the basic ideas and hopes of the Enlightenment. He tried to apply them. In so doing he constructed an ideology.

Chapter 2. The Revelation of Progress.

At the age of 21 and shortly before he was admitted to the Sorbonne to complete his theological studies Turgot drew up a list of works he should write. The list included original poetry and translations from the Latin classics, a demonstration of the existence of God from natural scientific necessity, and expositions in verse of a natural religion. The list went on to include prose treatises on the history and errors of dogma, the grounds of credibility, universal history, psychology, love and marriage, law, morality, tolerance, universal monarchy, geometry, the atmosphere, electricity, agriculture, finance, and a "general glance at human knowledge."¹ He would undertake all of it in the belief that knowledge was the source of all human growth, change, reform and reconstruction. All his life Turgot would continue to affirm that to systematize and extend empirically based knowledge was to expand and deepen human consciousness. Thus would individuals and the community acquire control over their physical environment and over their own actions. To improve the conditions of life, to reconstruct institutions and develop a better technology would be to continually enhance possibilities for a fuller, happier life. In 1751,

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 115-6.

concluding a pensée, Turgot affirmed that life has to be based on this hope. Only where and when there is hope can there be any kind of life:

Let us hope for everything, try everything. If our efforts are fruitless, we will not be more in arrears than we are now. By hoping and trying for everything, we lose nothing; certainly we will never have something we constantly despair of finding.¹

In one of the very few books in English ever cited by French historians writing about their philosophes, C. Becker has equated this basic affirmation of the value of the sciences and of the obligation they impose on those who know of them with the "leap of faith" made by religionists. Becker argued that the philosophes did no more than rebuild the Christian heaven in more secular terms. They did no more than replace the old eschatology with a new, more dangerous and more irrational chiliasm. Becker thus argued that the communists with their socialist millenium are the direct descendants of the philosophes. Philosophes and communists alike, he concluded, were and remain self-righteous and sanctimonious and ruthless in their desire to rebuild the circumstances of historical life without care or regard for the human costs.²

By drawing such a general connection between Christians, philosophes, and communists Becker has found no link at all.

¹ibid., p. 335.

²The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (New Haven, Yale U.P., 1966).

Simple hope and self-confidence is probably common to the psychology of all individuals in all historical periods; certainly it is common to all reformers. There were profound differences of experience and doctrine between philosophes and communists. The political and intellectual environment in Russia in 1917 was very different than it was in France in the years preceding the Revolution. The philosophes had not the memory and examples of 1789-1815 before them. Nowhere does Turgot even hint that he had any consciousness of the possibilities of a modern social and political "democratic revolution," or that he had any notion of the processes of sudden political change which would modify the scheme provided in Aristotle's Politics. He dreaded political upheaval, which he saw as a possibility in France.¹

There was irrationality and system in Turgot's outlook. But, contrary to Becker, it lay in the specific way he understood the various motives and actions of individuals as they grew and changed in communities. The pattern by which Turgot related his own time to times past, and by which he understood his own thoughts and actions closely paralleled the traditional religious awareness, not just in its faith

¹For Turgot's ideas of revolution see Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 290-4. Despite his emphasis on economic growth and change as he got older, he would never tie political and economic change together, except by arguing that the legislator is always morally obliged to encourage economic growth. He knew of the class war and integrated it into his historical understanding, but to him it remained a constant, something that never changed in its basic qualities.

and hope, but in the methods of self-justification and self-edification he developed.

Hazard has highlighted a frequently neglected facet of the Enlightenment, its renewed interest in historical study.¹ Before Voltaire's histories, narrative tended to be a semi-fictional and romanticized collection of tales and epics for the entertainment of literate gentlemen such as Cervantes' quixotic Don caricatured. Or it frequently was a catechism designed to morally edify and enlighten monarchs and their subjects as to their respective duties, rights and privileges. In the schools it had become a vast jumble of biblical exegesis and philological erudition.² Now, according to Voltaire's preface to his new universal history, the study of the past would have to be based on critical, independent evaluation of sources. It had to be a study of everyday experience in process of change through time, and not just a description of knightly or kingly gallantry, or of the episodes of the Hebrew and apostolic narratives.³

The young Turgot took this interest and these dictates very seriously. They by no means belonged to Voltaire alone.

¹La pensée Européenne au dix-huitième siècle (Paris, Fayard, 1963), pp. 336-45.

²See Vico's complaints, The New Science, 1744, trans. by Bergin and Fisch (Ithica, Cornell U.P., 1970), pp. 57-69. He would use all the erudition to come to some genuine secular historical conclusions.

³Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1846), Vol. 3, pp. 71-4.

Both of the discours which he defended at the Sorbonne in order to qualify for a degree and as a prospective cleric were outlines of universal history. Despite rhetorical lapses into vague affirmations of the eternal wisdom of the Catholic Church and its Doctors, both were early and outstanding examples of the new orientation. In addition to these discours, a large part of Turgot's intellectual production of the years before he left Paris in 1761 for the Intendancy of Limoges consisted of a series of first drafts for treatises on universal history and political geography. By political geography he meant a description of the various nations in the light of their traditions and patterns of development. The most complete of these plans, a Discours sur l'histoire universelle, was prefaced with remarks that would be considered no more than a paraphrase of Voltaire's preface had it not been written at least three years before the Essai sur les moeurs was published in 1756. In that plan Turgot expanded the basic themes of the Sorbenniques and filled his narrative with detail, while of course eliminating the minimal concessions he had made to his examiners.¹

Turgot's history reads at several levels. On the surface it reads as Hazard would have it, as rational, critical narrative. The narrative was secular in content and emphasis, as well as in its underlying theory. Turgot made a conscious

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 275-7. (prefatory remarks)

attempt at a scientific history. A short plan composed in 1751 for a work on political geography was organized around the argument that no active external agent, no anthropomorphic and supernatural Providence, played any role in the development of institutions or in international conflicts. Governments and peoples, past and present, said Turgot, have to be understood in the light of their traditions and institutions, which are in turn the result of circumstance alone. Causation he understood in purely secular terms. The hand of a supernatural deity did not favor communities. Instead, communities and individuals together have to be interpreted as typical results of the slow working of historical circumstance: products of varying systems of economic relationships, of geography to a minor degree, and especially of different kinds of governments and laws.¹

Turgot verged on two ideas which would be at the centre of the main currents of nineteenth-century intellectual history. He believed there was such a thing as national character, and that it could be isolated and analyzed as a historical product. But he in no way argued, as the later nationalists did, that national character in the last analysis was the result of a peculiar, distinct national soul, mentality or essence. And national character, race and genre were interchangeable to Turgot; none of these terms had the biological overtones they acquired in the latter part of

¹ibid., pp. 255-7.

the nineteenth century. National character was for him purely the result of chance circumstance.

On the other hand, Turgot was almost a historicist. But he did not draw the conclusions crucial to historicism; namely that because a distinctive set of institutions and character traits were peculiar to the members of one historically determined community such a community would rightly have its own peculiar sense of justice or truth or moral value. He was very aware such an argument could be made. But truth, he wrote to a fellow student in 1746, is not true only to its knower; it is not relative to its own time and place: "As for me, I say, truth is one."¹ If, as he told his friend, truth was one and eternal as far as religions and morality were concerned, it was also unchanging for more secular aspirations. He identified relativism with Montesquieu, who he in turn identified with the worst side of the parlements. In 1771 he wrote to Du Pont de Nemours in a bitter mood, brought on by conflicts with the magistrates in the local parlement of Bordeaux. Relativism, he affirmed, was the infinitely harmful tool Montesquieu handed to obstructionist, self-seeking, obscurantist magistrates and aristocrats. It is, however, absurd to believe that "the civil law can be indifferent" in the face of historical error, just as it is impossible to claim in the

¹ibid., p. 97.

daylight of reason that for mankind "there is not always a unique social order."¹

Turgot's history was much more than an attempt at social science, much more than an attempt to demonstrate or to derive theories concerned with past events, and much more than an attempt to dispel what he saw as a cloud of inaccurate historical apologetics. In classic manner, his history went beyond this attempted trial at secular, rational evaluation of historic events in themselves to draw very specific lessons from the past for his contemporaries about politics, morality, nature, true religion, and later about economics. At this level of self-edification Turgot's history started on its way to becoming the philosophes' equivalent of Bossuet's recent Christian discours. Both used historical example and narrative to reveal certain meanings and lessons meant for the ears of French rulers as well as for their own personal satisfaction. Both were meant to show the basic purpose and policies necessary for any and all governments.

At the outset of the eighteenth century Bossuet had demonstrated the past benefits achieved when religion and government were at one, each sanctioning and upholding the other, together preserving traditional laws, social customs and economic practices. At a more prosaic level, Bossuet made political success and Christian piety inseparable. When the two are allied and when religion and political

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 3, p. 471.

authority are understood aright the monarch will be truly successful and long-lived. He will defend and strengthen the "fundamental laws" and therefore will contribute to social stability and his own permanence. He will defend the ancient customs and prerogatives of the three orders, clergy, nobility and the third estate. And the King will consult the representatives of the orders, especially through their legal defenders, the parlements.¹ At times Bossuet taught his lessons by interpreting specific events of French history, but he much preferred the grand--the more easily sermonized--perspectives of universal narrative. Knowledge that would lead to truly provident political policy reveals itself best in the total web of history--"above all in the history of the great empires, where the grandeur of events renders them most palpable."²

Turgot's discours, like Bossuet's, were meant to be philosophical reconstructions of the whole of the past. They were to develop the sum of the principles or laws that relate the past to the present. He looked for the continuity that would give sanction to the most general political direction of the rulers of the present. The precedents of history would enlighten them as to what their goals should be. The tone of Turgot's history was much the same as Bossuet's. Only

¹See Goyet's paraphrase of the discours, L'humanisme de Bossuet (Paris, K. nekseick, 1965), pp. 299, passim; also see Sée, L'évolution de la pensée politique en France (Paris, Glard, 1925), pp. 9-17.

²Quoted in Goyet, op. cit., p. 310.

from a universal history can universal lessons be drawn. History, Turgot explained in one of the plans, was more than the discovery of accurate narratives of past events. It had to be more than reasonable explanations of particular causes for individual happenings readily observable. The historian describes a coherent past and the principles that make it cohere. In his work the universal historian first shows that progress, continuing reform and thus continually increased happiness can and does accumulate. Second, he shows how it all takes place, and third, what conditions history demonstrates are necessary for continuing progress in the present. In one of his more hurried drafts he wrote:

Universal history embraces the consideration of the successive progressions of mankind and the detail of the causes which have contributed to them. [It embraces] the first beginnings of men, the formation, the proliferation of nations; the origin, the revolutions of government; the progress of languages, physics, morality, of manners, of the sciences and of the arts; the revolutions which have brought about the successive empires, the succession of nations to other nations, of religions to previous religions; the human kind always the same in its upheavals, like the water of the sea in its tempests, and marching always to its perfection.¹

Turgot's narrative and lessons would have edified any philosophe. He concluded his second discours at the Sorbonne by remarking that mankind had just recently left the "dark night" of medieval ignorance for the clear daylight of reason. A new age is dawning, a time of intellectual and social improvements which would surpass

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 276-7

any progress ever dreamed of by previous generations. Clerics, he concluded, are thus obliged fully to recognize, then emphasize, the aspects of their creed and their Church which had in the past been progressive.¹ Here he modified the usual philosophe narrative slightly, but not materially. According to Turgot the Church was not necessarily uncivilized or unprogressive. Instead, certain aspects of Christianity were responsible for civilizing the barbarian hordes that he believed had overwhelmed Rome in great and sudden waves. It brought to them a knowledge of intelligent administration as well as Christ's teachings. Christ's mission, when understood aright, meant moral and mental progress. His missionaries improved the barbarian mind. Turgot maintained the same argument in the unpublished plans, significantly qualifying it by emphasizing that the progressive qualities of Christianity as it was traditionally understood were only relative: Christian Catholicism could not help but improve the minds and politics of illiterate savages who were just entering the ranks of the human race.²

Apart from the dogmatic darkness which had in the past attended it, Christianity had brought advantages for both the individual and the community. These facets of the utility of the Church which Turgot emphasized in his first discours were the main headings under which he developed a

¹ibid., p. 235.

²ibid., p. 270.

host of more specific lessons in the later plans.¹ Turgot argued that Christianity had replaced idolatry, "the most extravagant superstition," with reason, or at least with an awareness that such a thing as reason could be developed and used. It did so by eliminating the bizarre from the convert's consciousness. Converts were inspired with a new reverence for truth, and in its educational institutions and islands of monastic peace the Church more fully employed more genius much more profitably than the barbarians ever could. It also brought moral strength to the barbarian mass. Christianity possessed a solid and explicit ethics. In politics, Christianity contributed to stability and liberty by replacing the bizarre systems of barbarian taboo and barbarian tribal particularism with a transcendent, more abstract, and therefore more generally applicable ethic. Even dogmatic Christianity was far more tolerant than barbarian parochialism. Finally, Christianity rendered the relations of rulers and ruled more harmonious by making all sides aware that their obligations were reciprocal: "The laws must enchain men, but enchain them for their own happiness."²

In sum, the coming of Christianity meant one step forward along the road to a fuller human happiness. Christianity was and could remain good only if clerics would note the lessons of the past. Turgot argued that it was

¹For the lessons in outline, see ibid., pp. 198-210.

²ibid., p. 211.

to be valued not because he believed its goodness lay in any metaphysic of creation, but because it was useful. The most basic lesson of all was that things were good when they were useful to those who rationally strove for measurable ends. Catholicism had worked in the interests of the progress of the original Europeans by "softening their furies, tempering their action, moderating the fall of states, correcting their laws, perfecting governments, rendering men better and happier."¹

Turgot retained this belief in the potential goodness of Christianity all his life. He believed in its past utility, and he believed in its God in a very special sense. He secularized his religion; but that does not mean he made it any less metaphysical. To him this religion properly interpreted sanctioned tolerance, moral strength, the unquestionable value of the search for knowledge and improvement, political honesty and responsibility--all that was useful. Utility was the lynchpin of his notion of natural law, or the universal and unchanging truths applicable in any situation. It would be too easy to believe the philosophes and equate metaphysics with mysticism. Turgot used utility, like any metaphysical category, as an abstraction which described any and all merely experienced history. Utility gave all historical observation coherence and meaning.

¹ibid., p. 196.

The natural laws of utility were irreducible. They were beyond criticism. When Turgot said something was useful, he said it was morally good and ethically reasonable. A truly good, transcendent, disinterested God could not thus sanction intolerance or preservation of social and mental traditions or customs for their own sake. A truly useful religion could not uphold such "particularism," and would never have need of force or any kind of coercion to maintain itself strong in the minds of its converts. If only religion were better understood by clerics, Turgot commented in 1746, such people as atheists would not have to remain outside the Church; nor would they have to be social pariahs. There would be no persecution because there would be no atheists. There would be no radical dissent because no one would disagree with "self-evident" principles. Misguided clerics and equally confused atheists are led into an impasse where the first by their blind credulity and the latter by their cynicism are led to proclaim that religion can only be maintained by or on the basis of the threat of coercive state power. "Basically, intolerance came to be upheld only by those who regarded religion, which is natural in itself, as an invention of politics."¹ The recognition that tolerance was a final, in effect religious principle, would eliminate the problem. He asked for an end to this impasse in two later letters on tolerance which have since become among the more widely known of his

¹ Ibid., p. 96.

works.¹

Turgot's message was not exhausted by the lessons of utility. If clerics and administrators are not certain he has shown them their rightful duties, he argued in his second thesis, let them look beyond themselves at the pageant of history and see how it moves of itself. Then let them be moved to take proper action. Turgot's history was a theodicy. Here again his private drafts filled in some of the details left out of the discours read at the Sorbonne. The traditional Christians, Augustine and Bossuet and countless others between, had been moved to and reinforced in their belief by the workings of Providence as shown by the retrospectively verifiable truth of God's word as known to the prophets in the Old Testament, and no less by the workings and meanings of all natural and human things.² Turgot was no less edified by the unending process of intellectual and cultural accumulation, of education and progress that he knew history to be.

Turgot believed that under the conditions which he had elaborated in the Sorbonniques progress would occur rapidly and could be consciously directed. But for him, progress was in any case inevitable. It was so, he argued, for two reasons. First, human nature is in its very essence progressive. It is good and therefore seeks the good.

¹See ibid., pp. 387-424.

²See Goyet, op. cit., pp. 255-7, 271, 308, passim.

Progress was and remained a result of the attributes that distinguish the human from the merely animal. It was a result of mankind's capacity to reason, and of its restless curiosity and ceaseless inbuilt quest for truth.¹ Second, the more specific aspects of human nature made progress inevitable by a law of compensation where initial errors eventually called forth truth. With very few exceptions,² psychologists of the day claimed that the content and structure of human knowledge, perverted or truthful, was strictly the result of a direct interaction between the mind and its physical, sensible environment.³ Turgot merely projected this idea onto the stage of history to explain how whole civilizations changed. He was by no means the first to do so.⁴ Stimulated by innate curiosity, mankind used the faculties of memory and association, and slowly accumulated knowledge of things physical and human. First came knowledge of the exact relationships between natural phenomena. Then the collective mind learned of the relationships between human actions as they interact to shape history and politics.

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, p. 220.

²Besides Rousseau, the major exception was Vauvenargues, a literary critic. See Mercier, La réhabilitation de la nature humaine (Villemonble, Editions "la balance," 1960), pp. 419-22.

³Condillac crystallized and systematized the doctrine in the middle years of the century in books which were soon in use in the schools. See Damiron, Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de la philosophie au XVIII^e siècle, Paris, 1858-64 (Geneva, Slatkine Reprints, 1967), Vol. 3, pp. 226-82.

⁴English deists had been doing so for many years. See Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1959), pp. 70-81.

Finally, man learned of the relationship between experience and the mind. Thus speculative natural science and its applications in technology, social science and its application in legislation, and even to a certain extent artistic expression progressed. All of it was the result of a universal process of trial and error. "Men, instructed by experience, become more and more completely human."¹

Turgot singled out two vehicles of historical progress, genius and language. Language, the material with which genius works, develops from complex, indiscriminate representation of divers sensations towards simplification, abstraction and exact representation and meaning. In time it becomes a clear, precise catalogue of experience ready for the hand of the master mind. Appearance of individuals with striking powers of memory and association, and with an extra concentration of the universal passion to achieve was guaranteed by the laws of probability in all ages. Genius, however, had to be given the opportunity to apply itself to problems. Turgot had of course argued that genius could only be applied under the conditions set out in his first discours. The rate of progress thus varied inversely with the degree to which clerics and administrators were ignorant and intolerant. But even if the rate varied with changing conditions, progress of some kind was always guaranteed. The very errors of immorality, superstition and tyranny were the stimuli which resulted eventually in

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, p. 284.

betterment. No one could know right from wrong until wrong had been experienced. These errors inevitably showed themselves as such to moral, political, and scientific genius. Turgot reconstructed the best of all possible worlds with his history, even though it always showed that reforms were never complete. He believed life to be full of crises. But in the process of crisis man learns, and "the human mass by alternations of calm and agitation, of goods and evils, always marches, however slowly, toward a greater perfection."¹

While Turgot would change many of his thoughts about the motor of progress as he developed under the tutelage of Gournay into an economiste, he would always retain his vision of participation in a vast, immeasurably jumbled and apparently confused, but nevertheless always lawful and in the last analysis inevitable and coherent process. He had synthesized the various ideas of the philosophes and had almost taken a step beyond them in self-edification. Few were more consistent. He prefaced his second Sorbonnique with a hymn to the new revelation:

Reason, the passions, liberty produce new events unceasingly; all the ages are interconnected by a set of causes and effects which bind the present state of the world to all those which have preceded it. The arbitrary signs of language and script, in giving men the method of assuring themselves the possession of their ideas and of communicating them to others, have formed from all particular knowledge a common treasure that

¹ibid., pp. 215-16.

one generation transmits to the next, thus a heritage always augmented with the discoveries of each century; and the human race, considered since its beginnings, appears to the eyes of a philosopher as an immense mass which itself has, like each individual, its infancy and its progress.¹

Historical progress is everywhere evident; history is providential. Five years after he delivered his discours at the Sorbonne, Turgot returned to these basic themes in an article on word origins and development which he wrote for the Encyclopédie. Of the five essays he wrote for Diderot,² Étymologie was the most important in the larger context of the Encyclopédie. After restating his ideas about historical development he went on to point out how useful, how revealing studying history at the apparently picayune level of words could be. Such a study, he observed, allows the student to measure the level of development that a people has attained. More important, it shapes the student's mind properly; he becomes progressive. This study sharpens the student's awareness of progress and makes him at the same time more aware of the necessity of accurate, clear, right thinking. Etymology reveals the real nature of the historical progress every people goes through, and which everyone must anticipate and encourage. Even words alone are revealing: "If these details of languages and words with which the art of etymology

¹ibid., p. 215.

²These included four shorter articles on the philosophical category Existence, on the physical property of expansion, on commercial fairs, and on charitable foundations.

occupies itself are like grains of sand, it is valuable to collect them, since these are grains of sand that the human mind has set down along its path, and which alone can indicate to us the traces of its passing."¹

The basic process involved in secular revelation is thus not different than the thought process involved in traditional sacred revelation. The providence, the motive force which initiates and gives purpose to historical change for both is reason. Whether universal human reason or divine reason, it is a cause of the whole orderly movement which is enough or sufficient in itself; it is a cause whose absence would be enough to leave the whole set of subsidiary assumptions and principles about order and purpose an incoherent jumble; if not progressive, the world was meaningless and utterly confused. Condillac, Turgot's contemporary, defined a system as "nothing but the disposition of the different parts of an art or a science in an order where they mutually sustain themselves, and wherein the last are explained by the first...and the most perfect system is the one in which the principles are of the smallest number; it is even desirable that they be reduced to one."² Applied to much more than one art or science, applied to all human existence in all times, progress was that one principle for Turgot. It gave meaning to all change, and

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, p. 506.

²Quoted in Damiron, op. cit., p. 254.

and integrated all problems into one: a man could be either progressive or unprogressive, but there was no middle ground. Turgot could declare something wrong because unprogressive and therefore inhuman. He had to be able to make such an evaluation if his vocation of reform was to carry any conviction.

Sacred and secular revelation are parallel in another sense. For both, history proves its truths and foreshadows the future without necessarily making specific predictions about anything, whether of the special results of progress at given dates, or of any specific result of God's will in a specific event at a specified time. It is enough to know that the whole process of orderly change takes place. The system has to be edifying, not predictive, because prediction involves the possibility of error and thus an inevitable skepticism. For Bossuet's intellectual and spiritual forefather, Saint Augustine, ultimate purpose was everywhere witnessed in apparently chaotic events, in words, in all human experience in general--yet only in retrospect: "wherever we turn among the things which he created and conserved so wonderfully, we discover his footprints."¹ Like his etymology, Turgot's political geography had the same kind of goal. He wanted to trace the evidence of his own principle in the documents of all the nations. He went to a great deal of trouble and research to

¹The City of God, trans. by Walsh et. al. (New York, Image Books, 1958), p. 239.

trace, as he put it, the workings of universally progressive human nature from time to time and place to place. Past progress assured him that the present could only be happier than the past, and that in the future there would be yet a greater happiness. The future was foreshadowed in this most general way by the unfolding meaning of the past.¹

F.E. Manuel has gone over some of this ground. He too found that Turgot built a theodicy. But, like Becker, Manuel concluded that all this philosophe did with his doctrine was express a hope for the future: "When Turgot contemplated the irrationality of the world, he derived consolation from the simple historical realization that the mathematical perception of the universe was so relatively recent an acquisition of the human spirit that its influence upon laws and morals had not as yet had an opportunity to make itself felt."² Turgot did much more. He interpreted the historical record in such a way as made it command him to commit himself. He did not merely express an idle, wishful, whimsical and consoling hope. He made his world rational with his theodicy; but it was rational only in the sense that the logical conclusion to any experience, any observation, was that it had to be changed. He made his environment point to what he felt to be his destiny, reform. All this was science to Turgot, and science meant action.

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 261-4.

²The Prophets of Paris (New York, Harper, 1965), p. 49.

Turgot's historical speculation closely paralleled the more emotional facets of traditional sacred revelation. Like a religionist, he found it easy to develop his sense of a purposeful, orderly world when dealing with vast empires and very long periods of time. But when he went farther into his history he was led up to the questions about lawful behavior and inevitable betterment that theodicy raises when its rules are applied to specific events. He had to show to what end a specific act tended; and if it did not obviously end in progress, he had to show how it did so despite appearances. Here a religionist ends in mysteries, inscrutable divine purpose, and the leap of faith. Turgot ended the same way. He noted that the historical records were ambiguous, and that his interpretation was a "paradox." He noted the immense complexity of nature and human society. He observed that in the face of this immense complexity man was and is involved in apparently endless frustration and dispute, error and discord. Nevertheless, he affirmed, because human nature is good and because it strives thus toward the good, and because modern science knows the mind as it is, the progress of human understanding has and shall continue to occur. One just has to believe. There has to be a reason, a coherent explanation for every phenomena; everything is provident. Perhaps mysteriously, he concluded, perhaps paradoxically, contested issues of all sorts will be resolved in the light of still unknown but certain to be discovered

"self-evident, irresistible knowledge."¹

Above all, revelation of this kind gives its believer a sense of release and freedom and personal significance. To Augustine and Bossuet, the study of human experience made faith necessary by demonstrating the absurdity of any conception of human life which would not give it a final purpose, goal or meaning. By overwhelming them with examples of human depravity and egotism, and with examples of the inconsequential nature of everyday life and commonplace hopes, along with examples of what seemed the unending tragedy of every generation's failures, history drove Augustine and Bossuet from disgust to amazement to tolerance for individual frustration and ambition, and from there to bewilderment and a sense that they had to make a choice. They felt they had to choose between chaotic involvement in purposeless tragedy and the comforting coherence that belief can bring. They felt every man was poised over an abyss which could only be crossed by an act of belief. Ultimately, disbelief was worse than absurd; it was absolutely destructive. If the world around is purposeless, then one's own actions must be useless too; they must only be part of a general chaotic drift. So the Christian tied himself to a timeless purpose of providence, making his own presence meaningful. He became the bearer of commandments and doctrines he knew to be right because they brought confidence

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 334-5.

to anyone who could believe. "The whole arrangement," Augustine wrote, "makes God's judgments all the more inscrutable and his ways unsearchable."¹

The more inscrutable, the more unreachably divine the message, the better; because if the word was so true that it was absolutely timeless and beyond reproach, then the faith could not help but be forever correct. God for Augustine, for Bossuet, and for countless theologians who came between them thus became simply the word Good.² If there was good nowhere else, there was good in God, and by association there could be good in his faithful. If there was a reason for existence nowhere but in this timeless, unreachable God, there had to be a reason behind the existence and actions of the individual who believed in him. Thus Bossuet could write that "the hope for the future order permits one to support the paradoxes of history."³ The Christian was of course left free and satisfied by his faith to do much more than find comfort in prayer and self-justification. He was free to try and change his world to meet his own needs, to try to bring some semblance of order into the chaos he always feared to be on the verge of overwhelming him. He was free to build his doctrinal and institutional edifice, his theology, his commands, his

¹op. cit., p. 486.

²See ibid., pp. 248-56, passim, and Goyet, op. cit., pp. 255-57.

³Quoted in Goyet, op. cit., p. 255.

coercive powers, because all the while he was satisfied he was in the right.

Turgot went through similar experiences when he composed his discours and plans. In synthesizing and applying the theories of knowledge and psychology and of the basis and meaning of life current in his time, he was brought up against the fundamental problems that Locke's psychology and the notion of a lawful physical and human universe raised for more than one serious thinker of the century. He had been toying with these ideas as early as 1746, when he was eighteen.¹ He began to build his world-view in 1748, with a plan for an essay on "the causes of the progress and of the decadence of the arts and sciences."² By 1751 he admitted to himself that the history of mankind was revolting, because it was disorderly and irrational. He felt that he was surrounded by a measurably chaotic world. It was, he observed, a world in which people were generally acting on anything but the basis supplied by eighteenth-century reason. There seemed to be much more to the human psyche than curiosity, memory and association. There has been and is, he noted, pride, vanity, opinion, self-indulgence, blind self-interest, prejudice and ignorance. Most people know nothing for themselves. Most people know only what they are told; they are credulous.³

¹See Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 91-2.

²ibid., pp. 116-142. He planned to submit this to an academy in Soissons.

¹ibid., pp. 332-3.

People feel as much as they think; innate drives, emotions and reason conflict. And human society is infinitely complex and is made up of aberration. It tends always to lawlessness and incoherence. But the reformer, the true leader, must still work for some coherent, knowable good, even though "we always learn of events too late and the politician always needs to predict in order to say anything about the present."¹

Turgot found two kinds of answers to these dilemmas. First, he concluded that a severe moral self-discipline was necessary for anyone who would serve progress in the face of chaos. He must be ready to stand alone. Although it would happen anyway, it was infinitely better to help progress along, to try to attain the level of understanding which allowed genius to direct or at least consciously add to progress. If creation and progress were the results of liberty, he concluded, such liberty could only consist of a strenuous self-discipline, an almost ascetic devotion which would liberate the mind and the will from the susceptibility to error typical of the mass of mankind.²

Second, he continued to affirm the reality of progress. By doing so he also continued to affirm his own progressive nature and purpose. As an Intendant Turgot would repeatedly preface the projects he undertook with explanatory letters

¹ibid., p. 331.

²ibid., p. 324.

and preambles which would explain that a particular reform or piece of legislation was only the result of his own transcendent motivation and awareness. He would explain to the conseil d'état that he was only gathering in the revealed lessons of history by writing this or that order-in-council for their consideration. For example, in 1764 local businessmen in Limoges asked for a renewal of their privileged access to mineral resources. This request was of itself proof to Turgot that he was indeed progressive, for he knew that all history had shown that monopolies restricted competition, and thus intolerantly excluded genius from due opportunities. He recommended the request be denied and submitted a long memoir on mining concessions which argued that this particular request was only a verification of what he had long known from the study of history. If the government was progressive it was not bound by history, but only obliged to recognize its lessons. Thus Turgot was free to ignore a tradition, but not free to fail to change it. He could be different, isolated, but not therefore wrong, or perhaps too extreme. The alternate tradition of progress sanctioned only reforms, and history demanded change.¹ To be different was usually to be right.

Later, while Contrôleur Général, he explained to the King that by abolishing the guilds which Colbert had worked so hard to strengthen he was not identifying the monarchy

¹See Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 358-65.

with errors, and that he was not suggesting that kingly authority was not eternal because it, too, could make mistakes. He was, he explained, only learning the lessons of first trials. Colbert was not evil because he had failed by Turgot's standards. Colbert was good because he had at least tried. A first trial at economic or any other kind of policy was almost always bound to be an error. All he was doing, Turgot said, was to continue to keep the monarchy on the side of progress. And the King had better let him, he told Louis XVI, because in the last analysis political authority lies with the overall commands of progress. A knowledge of the errors of the past, coupled with the knowledge that good statesmen had always tried to correct the failings of past trials, should be enough to show that change was necessary. All things, not least monarchs, must serve progress.¹

Turgot returned to the related themes of progress, discipline and revelation for the last time in 1780, a few months before he died. Commenting on the Gordon riots in London, he restated his confidence in himself and his ideas. He remained certain he was right, and he clearly understood that in this rightness he was relatively isolated. But the very fact of his difference was enough to reveal, to reconfirm his self-confidence. The violent errors of the mass were only the proof of progress and of its disciplining

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 149-62.

commandments. These riots once again brought him before the apparent abyss, before the apparent chaos he had overcome with his history thirty years earlier. The rioters, he observed, did not reason, they demanded. Thus they were wrong; consciousness of this wrong was the sum and essence of his step forward. That he could know someone else was wrong was the very proof of progress. He did not retire into whimsical hope, but instead into a last assertion of the historically demonstrable necessity of continual reform. Reform required discipline and faith. Anyone who was aware of the laws of progress, he noted, was visibly isolated, but that isolation was in itself the proof that he was progressive. The riots are a "fanatical sedition," he concluded in some remarks that could easily be misinterpreted to suggest that he felt a physical distaste for a forever unredeemable human mass: "That proves what we already knew, that men are still very far from being enlightened and, what many do not know so well, that there is no greater enemy of liberty than the people."¹

Turgot's idea of progress was, at a deeply personal level, as much a rationalization of an intensely emotional revulsion for French social life as it was an expression of commitment. His reaction to the Gordon riots was not just an exceptionally brittle and crusty response on the part of an aging, ill man. He always emphasized self-discipline

¹ibid., pp. 628-9.

to the point of ascetic devotion to right. He always argued that isolation was no proof of error; isolation was often sufficient proof of progressiveness. He liked Rousseau, for example, because Rousseau as he understood him argued that education consisted of acquiring moral strength and discipline, not from outside, from coercive churches and governments, but from within. Only when educated in this self-discipline and dedication, he told David Hume and later Condorcet, could one really serve progress by appealing to men's better nature despite their (temporarily) misguided or even perverted objections. "Honest sentiment," "private virtues," he told Condorcet, are the real and emotional needs of humanity. Ideas, truths are only good once they have acquired a sensible, emotional significance. "One can therefore serve them all in treating of the questions of public welfare solidly, tranquilly, not coldly...but with that interested warmth that is born of a profound sentiment of justice and of the love of order."¹

The basic ideas of psychoanalysis are helpful and applicable to what Turgot was doing with the idea of progress. As Turgot understood it, progress would make most people miserable. The problem here is how Turgot could consider himself eminently reasonable and stable, all the while consistently disciplining and ascetically dedicating himself to his ideas to the point where he had no

¹Turgot on Rousseau to Hume, Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 659-61; on Rousseau to Condorcet, Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 639-40.

meaningful life but one that hinged entirely on external circumstance. Psychoanalysis begins with the assumption that everyong strives to build an "integrated," purposeful personality and a coherent mental universe. However debatable this assumption when it is applied to "normal" people, it is certainly applicable to one so thoroughly committed to reform.

A freudian could discourse voluminously on the father imagery inherent in the idea of progress. Progress, like the father, demands discipline, abstinence, tempered wisdom and hard work. It expects a lot from its adherent. It demands suppression of such emotions as are associated with sexual love and more aggressive self-indulgent drives. All thoughts and actions have to be altruistic. The whole emphasis of Turgot's idea of progress was on use of these "passions," as the Enlightenment labelled them, to promote disciplined inquiry and rational, impersonal action. And Turgot argued that the source of all real, productive discipline lay with the emotions. Emotional drives, he observed, can only be repressed and redirected with a discipline built of drives of equal or greater strength. Discipline was not disciplined unless it involved some felt abstinence. He found French didactic poetry of his time too "timid" because it did not capture the earthy sentiment and emotion that was a central part of any man's life, and because it did not plumb the depths of love and sympathy that underlie commitment. To be able

to change something completely, one must first of all dislike it thoroughly. All energies must be focused on the goal. Love man, and it will be easy to hate his errors.¹

A freudian would find some real evidence to prove that Turgot's progress was only a set of interlocking rationalizations of fundamental emotional problems which in turn involved larger social conflicts. Turgot never married, and there is no evidence to suggest he ever had a mistress. He explained his celibacy to Du Pont as partly the result of some lack of personal appeal on his part. He also just did not want to have anything to do with women, unless it was with their minds--if any had one.² More important, during his years as a Parisian philosophe and maitre des requêtes, long after he had dropped all intentions of taking clerical vows, he registered an extreme alienation from the French family in general, and from French women in particular. Everyone, he said, was wrongly educated, poorly conditioned by the environment. Marriage, he told Mme. Graffigny, has to be lasting and founded on sincerity. It must therefore be reasonable and sensible, based on mutual respect and rational self-discipline. Undisciplined, mutual desires and goals would collapse in a welter of misery and self-indulgent egotism. He found the French family in just such a state of collapse. Men and women, he informed his

¹See Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 631, 653, 672, passim.

²Oeuvres, Vol. 2, p. 506.

fellow philosophe, were at present brought up in an intolerant, authoritarian, rule-bound, frivolous, irrational society. There is no room for the free and liberal use of reason. Modern parents, he concluded, transparently referring to his own, lack the intelligence and the virtues necessary to raise progressive people. Fathers lack any sense of harmony; they know nothing of compassion and bienfaisance: "fathers are either indifferent, or unceasingly occupied with petty interests."¹

When his own father died Turgot was far more relieved than grieved. His death freed him, and he was glad.² Immediately afterwards Turgot dropped all plans to enter the clergy, and cheerfully entered the secular public service. In keeping with the usual French family practice Turgot, as a younger son, was assigned to the Church, his older brother getting first rights to the family inheritance and the best career. Turgot was conscious of wider opportunities than this old system allowed, so he found the Church frustrating. He was not content to exert himself in the discipline of the Church, which could not offer as attractive and rewarding a career as government administration. He had obviously been disobedient, if not actively, at least implicitly. This guilt perhaps led him to find a new father in progress and natural law, in whose service he could be more satisfied. Perhaps he felt so guilty because

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 244-54.

²ibid., pp. 235-38.

of his cheerful reception of the news of his father's death that he went on to make the new father more severe by far than the first, afraid to admit his joy to himself. Then he severely rationalized and sublimated his guilt by rejecting woman and marriage in the name of progress. By not marrying he showed himself he really was what his father had hoped. He showed himself he really was not guilty by abstaining from everything the new cause, in its altruism, did not explicitly condone or emphasize. Thus not marriage and love and sentiment, instead legislation and reform made for happiness by satisfying what Turgot forced himself to label real needs. Marriage and the home, in Turgot's intellectual system, could only satisfy very subordinate and essentially base, unchanging, unhappy needs, and change was the essence of progress.

Thus Turgot remade his world by constructing a coherent mental universe which both justified his deeply felt wish to rearrange his environment and rationalized a profoundly emotional rejection of the conditions in which he grew up. Like a religionist, he had given himself and his environment a related purpose and meaning which went far beyond rational criticism and choice. The idea of progress was so final and so absolute that any human aspiration which contradicted its basic tenets was simply an error. This is why the idea was so convincing and such a powerful commitment; no idea is authoritative if it can be criticized. The system was rational in the sense that it was logical. He believed in

it by faith, irrationally.

The parallel between religion and progress can go no farther, however, because Turgot constructed an ideology, not a theology. A religionist, too, could easily be a reformer. But religionists make changes in the name of a supernatural goal and purpose. At the most basic level their changes are not capable of rational evaluation, because they need not relate their reforms to any secular, measurable goals. The religionist's greatest happiness could only come after death. Faith was only the first stage on the way to renewal; death was the second and intermediate step. Turgot, on the other hand, believed that the ends of the universe, no matter how unknowable in their specifics right now, would be sensible and measurable, natural. Once he even suggested that Newton's calculations might in the future be disproved--something unimaginable to most philosophes. It would not be replaced by a metaphysics of astronomy, but by a better empirically verifiable theory. The revelation of progress logically foreshadowed such an unforeseeable development.

There was a greater difference between Turgot's revelation and the conclusions of the eighteenth-century religionists. Bossuet's just ruler satisfied revelation's commands by continuing in age-old grooves. This revelation allowed its believer to maintain his mental balance while the eternally recurring inevitable conflicts produced out of human nature went on to take their naturally improbable and irrational course.

Turgot constructed the revelation of progress in order to keep his mental balance while he actively attempted to change the world around him. Win or lose, his ideology stipulated that what was most important was the attempt. After a short and unsatisfying apprenticeship as a solicitor in the Parlement of Paris he carried his universe and his purpose to Limoges, where he tried to administer the lessons he had tried to reveal to others, but most particularly, which he had fully revealed to himself.

Chapter 3. Administering the Lessons.

Turgot was no messiah. He was no chiliast. While he was sometimes at the centre of dramatic situations, he excited no one. To his friends and enemies alike, he was "probité" incarnate. His enemies knew him as an honest man, full of integrity and devotion, but misguided, even stupidly so. All sides, philosophe and cleric, progressist économiste and traditionally minded privileged, knew him as an unexciting tool of still new and dramatic ideas. The ideas had charisma, not him. As all his biographers quoting his contemporaries have stressed, he was the very model of the ideal Intendant and member of the highly professional conseil d'état. He was publicly confident, assured, competent and fully awakened to the responsibilities and higher obligations of a civil servant.¹ Nor was Turgot an unusually dramatic writer. He was clear, concise and, except in his dissertations at the Sorbonne, where he had to prove his knowledge of rhetoric as well as of history, seldom stylish or more than dry. Even when corresponding with his closest intimates he would only very rarely make sudden and dramatic pronouncements.

In practice he would never seek martyrdom in the name of progress. Turgot always preached that any reformer, intellectual

¹For a summary of the ethics of the eighteenth-century civil service, see Gaxotte, Le siècle de Louis XV (Paris, Fayard, 1963), pp. 314-330.

or administrator, would have to stay in a position from whence he could accomplish something. His correspondence with his younger protégé Du Pont de Nemours is instructive. Du Pont was much more frankly radical than Turgot. He was far more given to dramatic posturing. He was always inclined to battle the magistrates and clerics head on and on their own ground. Turgot sent him many letters advising caution and compromise in the name of small gains while he edited Éphémérides, a philosophe journal. Ideas and policies, Turgot told Du Pont, were useless if they existed only in the heads of self-indulgent or rigid intellectuals or reformers, which was where progress would remain if Du Pont was not careful. Hang on, Turgot wrote, for no gain would be possible if opportunity to make it was lost, if Éphémérides was banned by the censor.¹

When he was Contrôleur Général and in the royal favour Turgot had Du Pont named Inspector General of Commerce. After Turgot was dismissed in 1776 and reprisals seemed imminent he cautioned Du Pont to do or say nothing that would label him part of a Turgot faction, and so cost him his job and reform's chances. He must not even approach Maurepas or Miromesnil asking that Turgot get his back pay.² And sensing the dangers to his practical effectiveness from such association, Turgot

¹For example, see Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 399-400.

²Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 490-1. Du Pont was dismissed anyway. He later became one of the more important members of the revolutionary assemblies after 1789.

consistently denied any alliance with any philosophes.¹

He would not give the magistrates any pretext to harass him more than they would for his plans anyway, philosophe or not.

Turgot was moderate. He desperately wanted change, but he felt that in the nature of things genuinely lasting and successful change would have to be slow. The people, he reasoned, would have to be convinced as well as affected by reforms. When he wrote his Six Edicts, and when as Intendant he sent out administrative circulars to his assistants, he prefaced them with long, didactic preambles painstakingly developing his basic philosophy. And he knew that in practice a reformer had to work within the institutions at hand and with available personnel. While an Intendant Turgot used the local clergy as administrative aides. They represented a large proportion of the literate in his généralité. Then when he thought about French politics at a higher level, he always argued that no institution was bad in itself; no organization necessarily lacked progressive potential. Despite his intense dislike for many magistrates, aristocrats and clerics, Turgot never grouped them under the headings of their institutions and designated them all reactionary, fit only for total dissolution and elimination. That would be impossible, foolish, and violent. Minds were to be enlightened, not destroyed. Most important, the revelation of progress

¹For example, see ibid., pp. 627-8.

enabled Turgot to assimilate and interpret his enemies; he could understand and tolerate them without despairing-- usually. He would and could deal with his opponents because he knew that their very existence was to his advantage. He had convinced himself that evil begets good, chaos passes into reason and order. He could learn from their mistakes. The truths of progress, remember, were the results of misguided errors, of the observed faults of previous trials.

The revelation of progress was comforting, and it made the world good, albeit only in the last analysis. Turgot was intellectually and emotionally convinced that a better world would have to come, and that it was on its way. He was certain there was real ground for hope. Thus he could usually withstand the strains and conflicts his reforming posture implied. He could work within the institutions at hand without necessarily compromising himself unduly. He knew imperfection was inevitable, for in the nature of man greater perfection would always follow on the onward march of faith and reason.

Apparently Turgot was ready to play the game of administrative politics rationally. While he believed in progress uncritically and continued to couch his every act in the phraseology of progress, he did not refuse to evaluate the practicality of his reforms. He kept his sense of purpose, his faith at one level, and acted at another; the coherence of progress did not, as it were, in its brilliance blind him to the fluctuating demands of practical politics. Seemingly, the revelation of progress was only

the circuitous route Turgot followed to excuse his participation within what he knew to be as yet unprogressive and alien institutions. He was ready to negotiate, compromise and attain whatever specific ends he might want and be satisfied with what was possible and plausible, given the means at hand. But the way Turgot understood politics, the way he understood human motivation and human society, the way he framed--not just his own existence--his own action was at least as irrational as the revelation of progress.

Had Turgot survived opposition and the Six Edicts been enforced, no doubt some of the most pressing problems that would combine to produce the popular explosions of 1789 and after might have significantly diminished or even disappeared. Certainly Paris would have been better supplied with grain at cheaper prices, thereby averting much of the rioting and fear which led the National Assembly deeper and deeper into radical politics and conflict. And by finally removing the walls of market monopolies and tariffs surrounding the city he might have removed the targets and sources of most of the population's anger. By publicly, honestly, and consistently taxing the aristocracy and clergy he might have narrowed the economic gulf which made social difference so onerous and frightening in the countryside. However, as contemporaries noted and Gignoux says, he had all the answers but not the ability.¹ He could not carry

¹Turgot (Paris, Fayard, 1945), p. 281; Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 460-1

the program through.

Turgot did not fail because he was somehow personally incapable. He could recognize basic problems, generalize about them, and come to answers in policy amazingly accurate and effective when seen through the perspective of the Revolution. He was energetic and assured enough to calculate costs and push his measures through. He was patient and painstaking and not afraid of conflict. He anticipated conflict at every stage. But the perspective in which he understood politics was crippling. This perspective was one result of the way he understood historical change in general. Turgot, of course, thought it was orderly and purposeful, lawful and in a very wide sense predictable. The enlightened, successful politician, the theory ran, was the one who sensed the present direction of this movement and acted to hasten and control it. Now movement Turgot believed a process of trial and error, of conflict and resolution alternating. He assumed that basic to human nature was this potential to recognize the truths inherent in a resolution of a problem. Once visible and sensible, truth would be accepted. From there people would be free to move on, groping for another solution to another problem, for another piece of knowledge. Natural laws, human and physical, were discovered that way, he supposed; tested in experience, they become self-evident to all. Everyone reasons and has some residue of good sense, however undeveloped as yet. In this way the revelation of progress became an action program as well as a justification. In

practice Turgot concluded that the state was essentially a pedant. Its laws, didactically presented and in their actual effects educational, have to be drilled into the heads of its less enlightened subjects verbally, but especially in experience. All the legislator had to do, Turgot believed, was be ready to stand utterly alone and coerce his subjects for a short time. He had to be ready to enforce his truths until the lessons were learned. Coercion, of which he was not afraid, was regrettable but necessary.

For Turgot, this notion of pedantic government was much more than a theory. For example, he knew from experience and observation that freeing internal trade in food grains would alleviate the disastrous effects of localized crop failures by encouraging grain imports and thus deflating prices. A market could be created. Many riots and crises could be averted. The magistrates' crusade against the King and the state could be stopped because their popular support could be eliminated. Well-fed people do not run into the streets in support of slogans spread by politically minded aristocrats and aristocrats' advocates. But many administrators, most magistrates, of whom only a relatively small number were consciously trying to lead a reaction, and virtually all the peasants felt that freeing grain trade was no answer at all. When in 1769-1772 there were poor harvests and severe price inflations in many areas of France including Turgot's own généralité,

the population of Limoges did not assault the people who administered the grain trade regulations, the magistrates and tax farmers. Instead, with the tacit approval of the parlements, they attacked the grain merchants, mobbing their wagons and sometimes trying to hang or otherwise rid themselves of these apparently pernicious profiteers who they felt were capitalizing on their most basic needs. Turgot had to give grain merchants police protection and guarantee them reimbursement for losses in his généralité. Then when the merchants refused to enter the district at all because of peasant aggravation, he had to ask the conseil d'état and the then Contrôleur Général, Terray, for money and other aid so he could import the grain himself.¹

Here, Turgot observed, was a perfect opportunity for the progressive politician. He concluded that the only way the dilemma could be solved was by simply throwing over all restrictions on the grain trade throughout all France at one stroke. The peasants will riot, he told Terray, but they have to understand and will learn the truth when the market mechanism settles into its grooves and of itself establishes a satisfactory arrangement where grain moves automatically to follow demand, at competitive prices. Except for the unredeemable, few magistrates would fail to understand they had been in error, once the truth is

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 111-41. For a lesser version of a similar crisis, see Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 408-17, 469-76. In 1765 Turgot came to the same conclusion he did in 1770. The problem at the earlier date was restricted to his généralité.

demonstrated to them. In 1770 he wrote a series of formal petitions and sent them to Terray, labelling any and all restraints on grain movement "the greatest of all obstacles to agriculture," and in general to the prosperity of the realm.¹ But, he asked in the last of the letters, will the voice of reason alone convince the peasant mass? No. For the moment the answer is simply strong, steadfast, consistent government action against peasant ignorance and despite whatever reaction might come from the parlement and the tax farmer lobbies in Paris. The King and his ministers in Paris must be prepared to stand alone for a time, totally without popular support or financial credit. The government would survive, he argued, because the people will indeed learn, their as yet untapped reservoir of common sense appealed to. Finally, the "usurpations" involved in the old tax farming system which had grown out of past errors would quickly disappear. A free market, Turgot argued at great length, would lead to immediate and rapid economic growth, and thus to greater potential tax revenues. The government would also gain in respect and authority when the errors of private tax farming were thus made obvious.²

Terray did not agree. However right Turgot was in theory, Terray could not possibly implement that plan. He

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 3, p. 266.

²ibid., pp. 327-53.

felt he could not assume that a free market would exclude any possibility of profiteering, and lead automatically to a good price. Merchants typically lacked bienfaisance. Terray also noted that merchants sought special privilege, monopoly, much more than they asked for free competition.¹ But aside from moral considerations, Terray could not take the political risks Turgot demanded. Terray knew no government could survive the popular upheavals and the bankruptcy which would result from such legislation. The tax farmers would withdraw all government credits and the parlements would become overwhelming as they led another crusade for the "fundamental laws." The crop shortage had by the end of 1770 become very severe in large areas of France, as Turgot knew. Something had to be done to avert mass starvation and to put off the parlements. In December of 1770 the conseil d'état compromised. It abolished taxes restricting the movement of grain to markets and areas of need. But Terray made all merchants register with the government so they could be closely watched. He set price ceilings and limits on the market by prohibiting merchants from purchasing grain before local harvests were successfully gathered and showed there was a surplus for market sale.² Thus Terray was able to improve the situation without alienating anyone too profoundly. The tax farmers lost some of their

¹See Weulersse, La physiocratie à la fin du règne de Louis XV (Paris, Presses Universitaires, 1959), p. 179.

²The decree is reproduced in Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 355-6.

revenue, but gained some as well because they did not lose their right to receive a tax for registration of the documents naming qualified merchants. The parlements and peasants did not lose their regulations, which they cherished as insurance and traditional right. Terray had recognized that Turgot's policy, right or wrong in theory, would mean political suicide. He and many others in favor of some measure of unregulated grain markets knew they were limited in what they could do by very pressing political realities.¹

Turgot had tried to cut the knots of the most pressing crisis he faced as an Intendant with one clean, clear and confident stroke which could easily have led to the rapid demise of the institution he worked for. He knew the human mind, he thought; he knew that in the long run the lesson would be learned. Terray knew that whether or not Turgot's confidence was mistaken, in the short run he and his organization might collapse, taking with it whatever set of truths it might carry.

Now all this was not just a temporary lapse of judgment. Turgot's notion of pedantic government was obvious again in 1776 when he tried to implement similar ideas in the Six Edicts. These edicts were implicitly very radical measures. From the moment of declaration they would alienate the two most powerful groups in France. Turgot knew that. He knew the court factions could, the magistrates and clergy would

¹See Weulersse, op. cit., pp. 180-5.

unite as one to demand more than his dismissal. Headed by magistrates, the first and second estates would follow precedent and demand, and maybe this time force a complete redefinition of the "fundamental laws." He told the King of the crisis he might create. But, he repeated, the people and even aristocrats and clerics would sense or learn the truth of the lessons his policy would teach in application. Turgot anticipated, further, that opposition would dwindle until finally these institutions would reconstitute themselves. Minds would change. Magistrates and clerics, most of whom were sincere and only misguided, would change and so therefore would relations between the parlements and the Church, and the monarchy. The decrees and the conflict to follow their implementation would bring everyone one step nearer awareness of progress and its rules--in the long run. Meanwhile, he concluded in his advice to Louis XVI, stand firm. And as for the objections magistrates are sure to raise, parlement " is no insurmountable barrier for the absolute power; I also count much less on these precautions than on the line which I have taken, in the preamble to this law, to demonstrate two things: one, that the corvée is incomparably more costly than the tax; the other, that it is essentially unjust."¹ This would be true of all the decrees: their preambles, he supposed, would perhaps be misunderstood at first, but the words would fill with meaning

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 5, p. 153.

as experience of the benefits of free markets and equitable taxation accumulated.¹

Thus at one level Turgot's reason told him he did not have to deal with the elements of politics rationally. He did not feel he had to work with what even progressive historical circumstance dictated to produce whatever reform was possible or even plausible. Confident he was right, and that this rightness would have to be recognized in application, he shut his eyes to most of the problems he had to deal with; he reduced them to insignificance. Again, while minister he literally slammed the door in the face of a group which could have been a real help to him at relatively little cost.² The courtiers seldom thought in terms of a general aristocratic interest. But they were very important in deciding who would be minister, and therefore whose policies would be tolerated. The assorted princes, princesses, and household nobles could be placated. If not won over, they could at least be neutralized with pensions and polite treatment. Turgot was aware of the conditions of a minister's survival at court in the King's favor, but he would not make concessions. He had vowed the King's household would economize when he was made Contrôleur Général, and he felt the favourable lessons learned from stringent management would again enlighten French rulers and their subjects. He had to arrange the pensions and

¹ ibid., pp. 178-82.

² See the incident reported by a contemporary, ibid., p. 435.

gifts anyway. He let it be known that the King granted his favours in opposition to the advice and counsel of his finance minister. The King was troubled enough when he had to ignore the pleas and arguments of the rest of his staff. He was deeply disturbed by the magistrates who told him in the lit de justice of 1776 that he was contravening every old and just and good law of the people he ruled by allowing these edicts application. He could not add to his despair by continuing to support a minister who, in addition to all his other trials, could not even trouble himself to be courteous towards his family and household.

Turgot remained isolated and defenceless throughout his ministry. When he left his edicts vaporized, and he had failed. He knew he had failed, and he knew why. He turned his failure into another revelation. He developed this theme in two letters he sent the King just before he was finally dismissed. The very fact that he had been defeated by the unprogressive and ignorant at court was proof enough for him and should be proof enough for Louis that his policies had indeed been lessons drawn from past errors. His edicts and actions were right because they ran directly counter the interests of those who had defeated him. These letters were indignant and unafraid. The conditions of his dismissal, he confided to the King, only revealed his true purpose and the errors of everyone else. He concluded almost triumphantly: "...I do not have such pride as to believe that I have never made mistakes. What I am sure of

is that they have been neither grave nor voluntary."¹

In a way, Turgot's failure was as much a result of personality failings as it was of his political mythology. As has been pointed out, his ideas and his personality were inseparable; part of the genesis of the idea of progress lay in a deeply felt emotional revulsion from French society. Turgot could be polite and personable, but only to those who agreed with him. He felt more than intellectual disdain for those who did not. He felt an almost physical disgust. The courtiers were for him just as revolting as the unwashed and unreasoning mobs that took part in the Gordon riots. And in a way he needed to be isolated. The revelation by which he explained his relationship to his environment demanded that he be exceptional. He could not afford to be polite and friendly with those whose errors he felt he was correcting. If he was, he could not be certain he really was as dedicated as his ideology demanded. In practice, the revelation of progress always made it necessary for him to be sure he clearly set himself apart from those he had to deal with. Thus he remained isolated throughout his ministry. Except for the King's good will, which was notoriously changeable, he never had any basis for the kind of political power he needed if he was to carry out his reforms.

In Limoges as in Paris, Turgot had to contend with

¹ibid., p. 458.

a dissatisfied population, the conflicting demands made on an administrator by the peculiarities of French household administration, ministerial inconsistency and administrative bickering, and at last a severe emergency which for a time aggravated all the sore points. Over the thirteen year period of his Intendancy he had four complicated and interrelated problems to deal with. These were constant. First, the population of his généralité was heavily taxed. He felt it was unfairly taxed, all considerations of reforming the actual technique of revenue collection aside. Limoges was overtaxed relative to other provinces, yet it was one of the most backward areas of France, and had to rank among the poorest potential sources of revenue. Turgot took statistical surveys and demonstrated the degree of over-taxation and poverty to the conseil d'état. He reformed the taille, the most abusive tax, by first getting the council to diminish the allotted amount of the contribution of the généralité each year, and second by reforming methods of collection.¹

Second, unduly high tax rates and inequitable collection practices only aggravated the far more basic dislocation and inefficient practices which were the results of the métayage or tenant farming system that predominated in Limoges.

¹On unfair taxation see, for example, Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 177-8, and a survey showing the degree of overtaxation, ibid., pp. 442-65. On reforming methods of collection--he introduced a taille tarifiée, that is, one based on ability to pay measured by possessions recorded in carefully kept tax rolls--see ibid., pp. 141-55.

Turgot could not do much here short of redefining the whole system of land tenure and tax privilege prevalent throughout France. He attempted to begin this extensive reform of property rights, at least of tax privilege, later as Contrôleur Général. He emphasized the widely held theory that agricultural productivity was disadvantaged by the use of indifferent labour such as the métayers, and that this labour without incentive was only more alienated by excessive taxation. He presented this argument annually to the conseil d'état. At the end of every year he had to submit a survey declaring how much revenue he expected to collect from his généralité in the coming year. Each survey was prefaced with plans for and theories to justify complete reform of the tax system. But he was more radical than these surveys indicated: only a complete reverse of tax incidence would solve his problem.

He tried to show in other contexts that only the large landowners who got the profits from agriculture ought to be taxed, and they minimally. If they were heavily taxed, he argued, the government would take away the capital even the wealthy cultivator needed in great amounts in order at least to keep production at its present level. Moreover, the peasants should not be taxed at all. He found that the métayers were most heavily taxed simply because they were too poor to afford to buy tax privileges. By taxing the peasants, he observed, the government was taking the capital they needed to buy seeds and plows so they could grow enough

crops to support themselves, never mind those who lived in the towns and those who owned or tenanted no land. And the métayer was only a little more underprivileged than the fermier who owned land, but not enough to run his farm like a business for reasonable profits, and not enough to acquire a title and a tax privilege. The government artificially raised costs of production. The government could only take necessary capital from the métayer, and most fermiers made so little profit that, for tax purposes, they could not be distinguished from tenant farmers.

Turgot emphasized that the government has to insure enough grain production to supply a market and to supply producers. At present, he concluded, the government only encouraged crop shortages by its tax policies, and thus conceivably it only added to its own instability by indirectly causing the riots on which the magistrates capitalized. He worked very hard to lower and reallocate taxes, and to convince the central government that it had to tax those who could pay. In this context he abolished corvée in his generalite. He did so in the belief that a more efficient working force could develop in agriculture if forced labour was not required; also, abolishing the corvée was only eliminating one of the most onerous and unfair taxes. Roads could be better made by a less sluggish and hostile labour force. Similarly, the presence of a paid labour force in the généralité would be a stimulus to agricultural entrepreneurship, as cultivators would be

able to anticipate a demand for their products. They would work harder to produce more and better grain.¹

Third, the administrative structure Turgot inherited was outmoded and inefficient. He could not readily or easily undertake even very modest reforms. Most administrative assistants were illiterate in his district, whether they were directly a part of his own organization, or whether they were members of the old parish hierarchy. To reform the tax rolls and take census Turgot had to use the clergy. But first he had to displace the syndics, the popularly elected tax collectors, with a structure he could more easily control. The syndics were infamous for their highly capricious procedures. He anathemized them and the system they represented. A syndic's own livelihood could be threatened if he went so far as to tax those wealthy enough to be able to afford to pay. The syndic was very often one of the poorer residents of the parish, elected to the position because he lacked enough economic security to be able to risk taxing the wealthy. Relatively wealthy parish residents inevitably determined who would live a tolerable life and have consistent employment, whether as a tenant farmer or farm hand. A syndic could not afford to upset his relations with his employers. And it was difficult for a more independently wealthy syndic to tax his fellows, for after all he had to live with them in the

¹On métayage see, for example, Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 309-11, passim (a concise summary of the problems for Terray). On the corvée reform see Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 200-17, passim.

parish. Turgot managed to displace this system, though never completely, by working his subdélégués harder. Finally, he had to assert his power within his own organization. He had to fire some subdélégués and discipline others. All officers of the French government tended to keep to tradition and treat their positions as privileged preserves. He had to chase his assistants. He had to supervise them closely and constantly; using the clergy was based on more than considerations of literacy alone. Subdélégués, independently powerful because invested with the power of the monarch, were a power in the villages. They had either to be brought to heel or circumvented.¹

Fourth, every reform Turgot wanted to make had to be approved by the Contrôleur Général and his council. He was thus indirectly involved in ministerial and court politics, and in the continuing dispute between the King and the Parlement of Paris. The project which he failed to have Terray approve was only one of many that had to be forgone or else compromised due to the larger context of the problems he had solved in theory. Theories were not easily applied. And all his actions were subject to the scrutiny of the local parlement in Bordeaux. Litigation arising out of his policies and decisions could easily be appealed from there to the Parlement of Paris. He had also to consider the power of the tax farmers. Any act he might undertake

¹On illiteracy and chaotic administration, see Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 272-93. On the syndics, ibid., pp. 262-68.

to abolish or modify any indirect tax had to be approved by the parlement, and had to survive any opposition that might be raised in Paris by the people who managed the collection of French revenues from indirect taxes.

Thus most of Turgot's problems and reforms were of an economic nature. His problems were well defined by his job. As an Intendant, a foremost representative of the growing state bureaucracy, his duties stopped at collecting direct taxes and enforcing collection procedures. But these duties had wide implications in eighteenth-century France. He found that the government's techniques of collection raised costs of production, caused production to decline or at the very least to remain at an unsatisfactory level, and thus lowered the general tax base. Much more important, he found that traditional social norms and practice precluded effective taxation. Seemingly minor administrative problems grew into enormous social and political dilemmas. Changing tax incidence, for example, implementing the first rule of effective taxation, that is, that only people who can pay should be made to pay, involved virtually revolutionary social changes. To place the tax burden on the wealthy would be to assert a right the King had never had--to treat all his subjects as though they were equal before the law, and as though all had the same duties, rights and privileges vis-a-vis the monarchy. In theory, remember, the King had no right to make laws at all; he had only to maintain well-established customs. Attempting to be consistent and effective

in carrying out the functions assigned to him, Turgot was led to build a sweeping platform of economic, social and political reforms. He worked out a sophisticated economic theory, but he needed more than an economic theory to justify his planned reforms of French social habits and politics. His science of economics grew into a science of politics.

There was carefully developed system in Turgot's platform, provided in part by the intellectual training he had received from Gournay and to a lesser extent from the Physiocrats while he was a student and maître des requêtes in Paris. From them Turgot learned that there was more involved in economics and taxation than collecting money, or even than production and consumption. He learned that there was an economic system, an over-all division of labour and a complex, delicate commodity or value circulation which governments must take care not to upset. According to the Physiocrats all value circulating amongst the members of a community, between all kinds of producers and consumers, came from one peculiar kind of production, agriculture. Quesnay and Mirabeau maintained this thesis rigidly, labelling commerce and manufacturing "sterile." These, the Physiocrats argued, did not add to the sum total of real wealth in circulation. Only agriculture really created goods to satisfy basic, natural, human needs. Therefore only agricultural production was truly valuable and worthy of government encouragement. Merchants and manufacturers were only the bearers of value. They merely reworked the products

of the earth to make them saleable, and then transported them to market. Turgot retained this theory in a special sense. He used it to derive a set of arguments against indirect taxation of the products of industry. He argued that the perceptions were bad because taxes on consumption only raised the costs of production for agricultural entrepreneurs, and thus lowered the total value of goods and services in circulation by reducing available investment capital for agriculture. He used the Physiocrat doctrine of the unique value of agriculture to give his argument added emphasis.¹

While reading through current economic literature under the direction of Gournay, an old family friend, Turgot assimilated much more. Gournay's own economic ideas were a compound of all the theories of the day. Some argued that increasing population meant increasing markets. Because value was the result of exchange, increasing value, growth, could only result from larger markets, that is, from population growth. Man, not the land, was fecund. More people also meant more labour, more productivity, and more variety in production. Thus general wealth increased. Turgot published a translation of a populationist tract in 1755.² Still others argued that the merchant who carries goods to market

¹For one of many concise arguments about tax incidence see Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 293-314. (See the same pages for Turgot's exceptions to Physiocrat doctrine, which was for him only valid when it referred to tax incidence.)

²Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 442-71.

for profit was the real source of all value, since there could be no circulation or market without circulators, merchants.

Turgot accepted these ideas, but no one system, until he set out his own in the Réflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses in 1766 (published 1769).¹

Six years before Adam Smith published his more famous treatise, Turgot argued that there was indeed an economic system, but that it was moved automatically by one all-inclusive, dynamic, natural law. He pointed out that there were elements of truth in all the Physiocrat and populationist theories. But the real source of circulation and wealth was more abstract, more general, and could be measured by all the criteria all the systems had developed. Turgot argued that the dynamic circulation all the schools had observed was the result of a universal profit motive. Profit was a drive basic and common to all people, regardless of situation--to farmers, merchants, industrialists, artisans and labourers. Physiocrats and others had only been measuring this same drive from isolated, different, and even parochial viewpoints.²

There were four central elements in Turgot's economics. He developed most of these before he articulated and abstracted the profit motive and made it the underlying principle of the coherence of the economy. First, economic circulation

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 533-603.

²ibid., pp. 537-43.

was automatic. Producers and consumers, driven by need for profits and need of goods joined together and formed markets by instinct. At market they bargained and dealt with each other according to natural laws of supply and demand to set a fair price. A fair price, Turgot emphasized, could not be legislated.¹ An economic system was a self-regulating, self-preserving mechanism which, left to itself, settled into an equilibrium of steady expansion.

Second, he stipulated that since circulation would establish its own best methods and a fair price automatically, a public servant can only work to guarantee the safety of the people at market; he can do no more than insure people absolute possession and freedom to dispose of whatever property they might have and might now or in the future want to sell. The right of private profit Turgot declared absolute. People formed markets so they might profit. This meant the right of private property was fundamental to the laws of any community. Monopoly was a restriction on this right of disposal and use, and traditional French social and economic privileges, along with the laws of usufruct and mainmorte, were unjust.

Third, governments must not interfere with this right

¹When he talked of supply and demand and prices Turgot did not bother with Physiocrat considerations of "real" or essential agricultural value. Price levels, he argued, automatically adjusted themselves for each commodity by the relations of exchange. Exchange value was determined by commodity utility, quality, and scarcity. Money was a commodity and its price, the rate of interest, was decided in the same way. See Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 79-94.

of property with taxation that produced any more revenue than necessary for paying the costs of police and defence activities. The French government must take care, he concluded, not to tax producers in such a way as to take from them what they needed to invest and maintain adequate and increasing production, directly with such taxes as the taille, or indirectly with the perceptions. Both constrict the market by raising costs to both consumers and producers. Finally, Turgot's most general conclusion was that the government's duty was to let the market mechanism alone to work out its own laws freely. It must attempt no regulation, because the logic of supply and demand will select the best opportunities and the best entrepreneurs, and will of itself produce growth through competition. Resources will be used best if used freely. Therefore, Turgot concluded for at least the fiftieth time, just before he was promoted and left Limoges for Paris,

What the government must do is...abandon itself to the course of commerce, which is no less necessary and irresistible than the course of nature; it must not pretend to direct it, because to direct the course of commerce without deranging it or obstructing its workings, we would have to be able to follow all the variations of the needs and interests of the industry of men; it would be necessary to know them in such detail as is physically impossible to procure.¹

Turgot's economic science grew into a political science. With him, science provided the rules to be applied in reform. Science meant action; its findings were only valid when applied. In time, Turgot assimilated his economics into his revelation

¹ibid., p. 625.

of progress, and so made his economic reforms a crucial part of the vocation that progress justified for him. Turgot meant all his reform plans as steps on the path towards acquiring the ideas of, and practicing laissez-faire government. But he understood his economics not just as a description of one kind of government obligation, or even as a partial description of only one of the many facets of human activity and social organization. The profit motive, he believed, did not just create a market mechanism. The individual was happy when his needs were satisfied. Needs could only be satisfied mutually, in communities built around successful markets constructed out of the profit motive. Thus, Turgot concluded in his Réflexions of 1766, the universal profit motive has always been and will remain the basic social bond. It was so for four reasons: because communities were built on mutual utility, because utility consisted of the satisfaction of needs or the creation of individual pleasure, because only production and exchange could satisfy needs, and because the profit motive alone led to production of goods and services. All else, sentiment, love, duty, is superfluous, perhaps real and necessary but only secondary. "It is this continuous advance and return of capital which constitutes what one must label the circulation of money, this useful and fecund circulation which animates all the works of society, which entrains the movement and life of the body politic, and that one has good reason to compare to the circulation of blood in an animal body." The

profit motive creates circulation: "...this circulation which, by the reciprocal exchange of needs, renders men necessary to each other and forms the social bond." Pleasure was the result of the satisfaction of needs, and only when the most basic mutual needs were satisfied could any more esoteric social interaction be established. Only then could more sophisticated needs arise and become profitable. Economic freedom was absolutely necessary--this was now the first lesson of Turgot's historical revelation. "As for the arts of all species, they can only be in the most extreme langour before the introduction of money."¹

If rational, economic profit knit the community, economic growth, which extended and increased social profit, could alone be the source of all progress. In his discours at the Sorbonne Turgot had argued that one of the most necessary conditions of progress was economic liberty. Trade and commerce caused the progress of reason; it taught in three ways. First, economic activity is fundamentally rational. It set measurable ends and arranged means in the most efficient, effective way, competitively. Economic activity taught reasoning habits of mind. Second, experience of trade and industry taught rulers and peoples that liberty, free access to all kinds of resources was necessary for happiness. Privilege was wrong; ability alone, genius in varying degrees, could lead to advance. Third, industry needed technology. It called forth inventions

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 575, 543, 576, respectively.

and natural science. The telescope which gave Newton his data also enabled merchants to cross the seas more easily. Progress for obvious reasons took place primarily in towns in medieval Europe, where Turgot also found monasteries and the best sides of the Church.¹

Long before he set it out formally in the Réflexions, by 1753 Turgot had made the synthesis. From the purposeful, orderly progress of reasoning man he had, by identifying reason with economic profit, rebuilt his historical understanding around the rational and purposeful progress of economic man. People have needs and they are answered by the need to profit. People produce to make a profit, and with this profit they sustain and in time improve their own existence and happiness. Therefore the vocation of reform has above all an economic purpose, and the reformer must always anticipate and encourage progress by encouraging economic growth.

In the last analysis the seller and the buyer are identical with the producer and the consumer; now, it is evident enough that the work of the producer furnishes all the needs of society, and that this labour has no other end than the profit from the sale. The fundamental principle of all society is attacked when restraint is placed on the right of property, of which the full and entire enjoyment is the end of all legislation, the motive that has driven men to quit the savage state to assemble in societies and to submit themselves to laws. Finally, to do so is to contradict directly the end which one proposes for oneself, which is to procure for the people its subsistence at the lowest possible price.²

When Turgot undertook his reforms in Limoges, he had exactly those two related goals in mind. He wanted to induce

¹ Oeuvres, Vol. 1, pp. 230-1.

² ibid., pp. 384-5.

progress and reason by freeing an as yet repressed profit motive from restraint. He wanted to free his people in a very special sense. The people, he observed, were fettered by a heritage of regulatory economic traditions and laws, by a restricting and abusive administration founded on the lifeless rock of privilege and ignorance. Above all they were held back by ignorance of their own possibilities, by the irrationality which grew out of such restricting conditions.¹ He worked hard to modify those conditions. He was successful in many ways in obtaining substantial modifications of government practice and traditional restrictions on the supposed strivings of basically rational man.

At first glance, the whole of Turgot's thought and action fit neatly into a marxist pattern.² His career can easily be interpreted as a bourgeois crusade. His Both as an intellectual and an administrator he worked hard and consciously to remove very real barriers in the way of a nascent industrial capitalism. Highest of all in his table of natural laws stood free access to any and all resources; this was guaranteed in the name of social utility, the profit motive, efficient economic expansion, and in the

¹See, for one of many examples, public and private, of this argument and set of goals, Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 234-5, 628-31, or Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 154-83 (memorandum on contemporary laws and "prejudices" against usury, taking interest, a right key to all the related rights of property and profit).

²Such as offered by Laská, The Rise of European Liberalism (London, Unwin, 1962).

name of the progress of reason. Turgot's more esoteric ethical ideas can be readily explained and even more easily dismissed as bourgeois opiates and the daydreams of industrial apologetics. The revelation of progress and the universalization of the profit motive could be interpreted as rationalizations of a new asceticism which enabled entrepreneurs to forget the wider ambitions and emotional desires they possessed. They could ignore thus their own humanity and concentrate on the job at hand, building and expanding new methods of production, industrial exploitation and trade--in a word, on progress.

Such an explanation assumes that the most typical and basic change occurring in eighteenth-century France was the expansion of markets and industrial capitalism. This one assumption is reasonable. Growth of towns, developing rural industry, and voluminous increases in domestic and especially foreign trade were all readily visible. Along with the Physiocrats, Turgot measured agricultural backwardness against the dynamic growth of these other sectors. The Physiocrats' ideal farm was an agrarian factory; the ideal farmer exploited his land instead of making the slow cycles of nature the basis of a plant-like way of life. Turgot saw métayage as only the most conspicuous example of potential progress lying dormant. His consciousness of what ought to be was in that way visibly determined by his environment. Capitalist expansion gave him a standard of measurement. On the other hand, industrial and commercial

activity was in real conflict with traditional French social and political organization. It was all founded on rigid control and implicit prohibition of many such undertakings. The jurandes and the monopolies, the vast jumble of indirect taxes, regulations and restrictions imposed on markets and movement of goods to them were obvious fetters on competitive and fast-moving entrepreneurs. Turgot anathemized this aspect of the ancien régime. He tried vigorously to abolish the restrictions, and he promoted changes which could only aid and promote the growth of capitalism.

But all this is too easy. The marxist interpretation also implies two very doubtful relationships. First, it assumes that bourgeois interest was the same as capitalist interest: capitalism as an economic system, in theory, requires above all economic freedom and competition, and thus the bourgeois logically should have demanded a competitive situation. Second, if bourgeois interest centred around competition, Turgot must have been a bourgeois prophet, because he consistently demanded absolutely free rights of access to all sources. Thus did his environment shape his mind. Certainly the bourgeois needed complete freedom to dispose of private property as he saw fit. Property rights had to be restricted to rights of possession instead of flowing in temporary usufruct from the King's divinely sanctioned authority. The bourgeois had to have clear access to resources so he could produce and exchange

commodities for his own profit. But that does not mean competition was to his own best interests; nor is it possible to assume that the bourgeois consciousness measured benefit solely in economic terms. In the eighteenth-century French capitalists sought social and economic privileges which would ensure them easy possession of the property they worked hard to acquire. Turgot got more than one revelation from requests on the part of local businessmen for privileged monopolies which would give them easy security against the ambitions of parvenus in Limoges. Marx's competitive capitalism was an idealization. Turgot's theory was equally divorced from socio-economic realities. He found he had to coerce the bourgeois as much as he had to teach the aristocrat, both having the same inconsistent, unharmonious, highly eclectic goals. While he was Contrôleur Général Turgot observed that one of the best arguments against the maintenance of traditional privileges was the hypocrisy such support implied. Not only was the old system wrong on ethical, progressive and economic grounds, it was inherently evil because under present conditions the laws of privilege had totally lost their old justification, their old utility. The King had taken over the army and justice. The aristocracy had lost its old functions. In reality, Turgot argued, it no longer existed, being economically as well as morally bankrupt under new conditions. Worst of all, the old rules only encouraged the self-indulgence and ignorance of the

newly rich and potentially progressive bourgeois. These people were by the old rules permitted to get rich only to buy privileges and thus only in order to become slothful and hold up progress. He found the whole system hypocritical, unnatural, inefficient and divisive: "The cause of the privileged is not the cause of distinguished families against the working man, but the cause of the rich against the poor."¹ Something more than bourgeois interest was at work in Turgot's mind.

In its more radical vein marxism stresses the unreality of the eighteenth-century crusade against privilege. Really the philosophes, their minds conditioned by their environment, only wanted to replace one kind of privilege with another. For aristocratic ownership and control of the means of production Turgot would substitute bourgeois control, along with bourgeois ethics. Again, such an argument is only a caricature. Turgot had no such motive when he tried to abolish the jurandes, for example. With their monopoly rights and internal privileges the guilds not only excluded potential entrepreneurs from good opportunities, they led to the formation of a large class of underprivileged, impoverished workers, the compagnons, urban equivalents of the mendicant, seasonal farm hands.² Turgot tried to overcome this inefficiency and social division by abolishing not just the jurandes but any and all possible trade, labour,

¹ Oeuvres, Vol. 5, p. 188.

² See Sée, L'évolution commerciale et industrielle de la France sous l'ancien régime (Paris, Alcan, 1925), pp. 323-36.

or commercial associations. Everyone, Turgot argued in the preamble to his decree--everyone has the right to work as best he can, to seek profits, whether he sells his labour as a worker or the fruits of his labour as an industrialist. Everyone is an entrepreneur, and compagnons are entrepreneurs without entrepreneurial rights. Any and all restrictions on complete freedom of the operation of the profit motive he labelled dangerous, onerous, and utterly immoral. Turgot thought he was abolishing privilege forever by disallowing any kind of economic special interests, unions or collusion. No one interest was so special as to achieve unfair favor by organizing in any way. There are no special interests. Everyone, he believed, has the same basic natural interest. Organization favors special interests, and that is unnatural.¹

If Turgot was a capitalist apologist, he was so only in a very special sense. To his mind, freeing the profit motive would never cause a society to divide between the masses of labourers and a few capitalists controlling profits and technology. Instead, once everyone was allowed to follow their profit instincts class differences would be minimized or even largely disappear. A nation of truly productive shopkeepers and entrepreneurs would emerge. Everyone would realize that everyone else was an individual with his own right to profit. Even owners of very large enterprises would therefore negotiate with labourers as

¹ Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 238-48.

individuals to produce a series of the best mutually advantageous bargains or contracts. No one occupational group would profit from any other unfairly; no one group would profit much more than any other and hence there would not be recognizable class differences. Only society as a whole would prosper exceedingly as the result of the sum total of increments of wealth brought about by this massive operation of individual profit motives.¹ Members of the community would thus be bound together by contract and mutual respect. The Six Edicts were supposed to begin to lay the basis for this.

On several occasions Turgot made very hostile comments about the English, whose parliament he understood essentially as Marx did. Parliament, he observed, was only a self-indulgent and unenlightened group of especially privileged profiteers, whose pretensions about political democracy and responsibility were only a sham, hypocritical apologies for their own unnatural, particular interests. This kind of government, he argued, caused war and revolution and oppression as much as ignorance and religious intolerance. It caused the American Revolutionary Wars, he noted; one of the reasons he labelled America "the hope of the human race" was because American victory could only damage this English barbarism, forcing the oligarchs to recognize the rights of economic everyman. Political freedom, he claimed

¹See Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 523, 495-6.

did not consist of the right of some to assert themselves over the equally legitimate interests of others. The free, truly democratic state is the one which strikes an even balance and preserves a "natural harmony" between the interests of all. Its sovereignty does not lie in popular opinion, but in universal truth, and certainly not in the artifices of elections and propaganda and mere possession of the means of coercion. Only insofar as the state works consistently to satisfy the instinctive needs of all its subjects or citizens together is it sovereign. Freedom and progress tend to produce an evermore transcendent, all-seeing, less English style of government.¹

A marxist interpretation of Turgot's theory and practice of reform can only be used if most of the emphasis and direction of Turgot's ideas about economic, natural society is dismissed as an opiate, as somehow incidental to the main or "real" theme, or as the superstition of the bourgeois mind. No such real theme was automatically reflected in Turgot's mind, and certainly not in his actions. Bourgeois need was not necessarily capitalist need. Turgot reflected the realities of his environment only in the sense that he recognized them and tried to change them. He tried to reconstruct, not reflect bourgeois interest; he tried to redefine bourgeois interest to make it fit into a highly idealized economic scheme which was not much different than

¹Oeuvres, Vol. 5, pp. 415-18, 536-9.

Marx's. The ideology underlying the Six Edicts was not incidental; he tried to implement its basic tenets. Thus the marxist has to argue that Turgot's progress was only a superstition, or else he was simply asserting the "real" bourgeois interest against what the bourgeois only thought his interest to be. Either Turgot or the bourgeois was essentially tending toward a predetermined end, and all that either thought about besides strictly capitalist needs was superfluous. Unless all needs are "in the last analysis" economic, however, Turgot had others more emotional and intellectual.

Superstition, système, habit, were the catch-alls of the philosophes themselves. Turgot and the rest dismissed such habits of mind as revelation and self-justification as incidental or else just diseased. Marx's psychology was not much different than Turgot's. Determined by its environment, the result of cumulative sensation and trial and error, mind was supposedly bounded by external circumstances. Turgot, as was the case with all Locke's followers, made a fundamental distinction between what people thought and what they really thought. Thus to Turgot a religionist thought about God and Providence, but he really thought about intolerance, privilege, despotism, economic regulation--about sensible things. The metaphysics and emotion of revelation were to him only error, and needed no further explanation. This distinction was only a mechanism by which Turgot managed to keep from speculating about his own categories, about the way he used such all-inclusive

abstractions as utility, progress and nature to judge others' minds and acts. His mind he knew by eternal nature to be the same kind of organ as the religionist's, and, if there was more to mind than truth and error, then there would have to be more to his own outlook. He could not allow himself to slip into this kind of introspection. He had to be sure of his own rightness and of his own purpose. He could not afford to enter the foggy depths of speculative epistemology and watch the light of self-assured certainty fade into endless hesitations about his own objectivity. He could not afford to doubt. He could afford to be completely skeptical about the sincerity, and critical of the ideas and outlooks of others, and he was. But in order to justify his own reforming ambitions he had made an admittedly irrational world rational; he had made the vocation of reform the rational conclusion to all world history. If his world lost this meaning chaos would loom nearby, and his life's work would become pointless.

The revelation of progress and Turgot's reforming activities were inseparable. He made the revelation of progress an action program; he identified so thoroughly with his notion of the mechanics of historical progress that he damaged his political chances. He developed a very sophisticated economic theory, one as good as any of the eighteenth century. He systematically referred his program of reforms to his economics, all the while assimilating his economics into the revelation of progress. So thoroughly

did he equate profit and the social bond, society and progress with each other that he wrote a capitalist utopia into his Six Edicts. Probably very few reformers have ever manufactured so consistent an ideology, and probably even fewer ever identified themselves so completely with a program.

Chapter 4. Conclusion.

Turgot could not conceive of rational reforms without reference to a closed and frequently dogmatic system which he had developed to give moral and metaphysical meaning and purpose to his life. The system was rational in the sense that it was logical, but he believed in it uncritically and irrationally, by faith. He began with a feeling, traditional to his family, that he was destined to be a public servant, a King's man. That he found incompatible with the position his father assigned him to, for he could not be a clergyman without considerable conflict and hypocrisy. And he had suffered some deeper revulsion against his immediate social environment. There is, unfortunately, little documentation to indicate the specific reasons for this. He found his world disharmonious. As he looked out past his family circle he found his problems were French problems in microcosm. Before he was twenty he had concluded that French social organization and its Christian explanation and sanctions were disjointed and conflicting; moreover, the set of institutions built on these sanctions seemed to him in profound conflict with the needs and purposes of individuals and groups that needed to be organized carefully, not just then, but forever. He found French institutions unnatural. As well as forms, the environs of action, minds had to be changed. Turgot was not alone in this desire. Magistrates, clerics, peasants,

even the aristocracy, virtually everyone consciously and unconsciously sought substantial change. To Turgot, and few historians would differ, everyone was in increasingly dramatic and violent conflict with everyone else. Peasants, magistrates and clerics united against the state at times; at other times peasants and poor clerics were in conflict with the privileged no matter what their class. The political system itself did not work. Parlements were not separate sovereign courts; indeed they were supposedly the right hand of the judging monarch. Yet King and magistrate were so opposed to each other that both were rendered impotent to solve the most pressing and immediate problems. Turgot tried all his life to rise above all this to find some new principles, and above all, one authoritative principle which would uphold all the rest, and which would bring the force of inner conviction to the reforms he felt had to be made. He looked for a new and coherent system in the light of which conflict and upheaval could be successfully minimized and explained. For this is what progress meant: to be progressive was to be increasingly sensitive, responsive and sensible. Thus could harmony grow from chaos. The new revelation was born of this inner confusion, this disturbance which Turgot sensed so deeply. Because these conflicts struck him so deeply he looked deep within himself to find a system which was emotionally, as well as intellectually, satisfying. Unfortunately for his political career, he was not able to

keep his self-justification separate from his actual program of action.

The revelation of progress led Turgot into some serious political errors. But the revelation of progress was more than a political program; it was Turgot's way of anticipating human actions and responses to his own activities. He had made his world rational, and in Limoges he was very successful in making reforms that to his mind should have led to very definite results. Freed from many of their ancient bonds, people in Limoges should have become more rational, or more progressive--more like Turgot. Events toward the end of his Intendancy were an attack on his most basic suppositions. Even after over ten years of education, people did not perceive their own benefit, their own profit and needs in the terms Turgot thought natural to them. The laws of progress, economic and otherwise, were nowhere evident. Purpose and order and reason seemed absent, even from Turgot himself. His reforms no longer seemed the logical conclusions to be drawn from the apparent logic of the movement of history. The whole intellectual structure was so much a part of Turgot's personality, and so much an emotional expression of what he needed at a psychological level that he only doubted of his own rationality once, and when he did doubt, it was only because he was under severe emotional and physical strain. The point is not that Turgot's fondest hopes were denied; he had, remember, kept these minimal, rational in his own

understanding of what was possible. His carefully constructed world collapsed in a confused jumble. As life became chaotic, disorderly, as events in Limoges contradicted his expectations he lost that clear sense of purpose he had worked so hard to find.

Chaos threatened to overwhelm Turgot, and in 1771 he began to retreat. The people, rich and poor, métayers and owners were grateful when he virtually abolished the corvée. They were equally pleased when he improved tax administration. But they did not gain the minimum of economic rationality and reason which Turgot had supposed they would with his social science. Landowners and métayers did not observably try to improve agricultural practice. Even the local society for the improvement of agriculture, joined by all the local enlightened, failed. And no one seemed to develop a sensible attitude toward markets and commerce. After nine years of propaganda and reforms nobody had learned anything. Farmers and labourers did not recognize their own supposed affinity with more obvious capitalists. These people still rioted against merchants and free trade rules when they needed both most. The parlement supported them implicitly, refusing to prosecute rioters and making still more restrictive regulations. Worse yet, his own administrators and his own superiors, Terray chief among them, had not yet seen the light. In 1769-72 all the human motives Turgot had assumed insignificant beside reason and profit came into play. Even merchants and industrialists continued to plague

him with petitions for market monopolies and exclusive rights to resources.¹ Tradition, privilege, highly unenlightened self-interest, ambition, ignorance, credulity and blind obedience and more enveloped Turgot until he despaired. Finally, when he urged Terray to ignore it all in all of France and cut the knot with one implausible stroke, he was refused, and he was unable to explain it. He could have accepted Terray's refusal alone; Terray's was only another error. But he could not ignore all the other circumstances.

Beginning in the middle of 1770 Turgot began to get unusually vehement in his letters and notebooks; his language became violent and disturbed. He dropped the cool tone which he usually used to describe his enemies. Peasant, ignorance, the indifferent central government which apparently blinded itself to its problems and taxed peasants while they starved, with "sectarian" Physiocrats, magistrates, the censorship, and finally Terray appeared in his letters to Du Pont only to be dismissed again in violent rebuke and name calling.² At the same time he turned to translating latin poetry, especially by Virgil, whom he found good, correct and clear in style, easily understood, relaxing and harmonious, "always natural." There he found a new struggle, he said, and a new way back to the old purpose. He sent his translations to Voltaire, explaining that successful translation demonstrated

¹See Oeuvres, Vol. 2, pp. 354-60, 478-94.

²See Oeuvres, Vol. 3, pp. 371-7, 394, passim.

that he and Voltaire could and would triumph with reason. In the letter he attached to his translations he observed that capturing Virgil's harmony in French was extremely difficult, like all harmony demanding, but still possible. It was hard going but when finished all was good. Much was good beside the poem itself. The task completed, self-confidence and self-respect were restored. The amour-propre so acquired renewed substance, he concluded.¹

Turgot anxiously awaited Voltaire's reply. When he discovered his secretary, Caillard, had been slow to mail the package he rebuked him vigorously for his slovenliness, at the same time sending another letter entreating Voltaire to read the poem.² Voltaire finally replied with a hastily written note excusing himself for not answering earlier, and begging pardon for hardly answering at all even now. Turgot replied again, full of polite eagerness, encouraged but dissatisfied. What does Voltaire think of the translation? Again he anxiously awaited Voltaire's letter, which did not come. He returned to his translations and sent some more. This time the accompanying letter pleaded with Voltaire to repay his labours with some small attention. He prostrated himself before the master, in a peak of anxiety he would not attain during the guerre des farines, the bitter bread riots in Paris which preceded his Six Edicts. Voltaire,

¹ibid., pp. 400-6.

²ibid., pp. 412-13.

apparently concerned, sent a condescending letter--keep trying. Turgot was bitterly disappointed and intensely troubled. He replied to this indifference with a bitter letter to Caillard, blaming him and other philosophes for the wrong, with a special snarl for Voltaire. He, Turgot, worked and sweated amongst the ignorant and the chaos they create while Caillard and the rest reclined in the salons and played intellectual games with the truths which had to be brought into the world.¹

Meanwhile, he turned his frustration towards his best friend and confidant. Du Pont was writing a didactic play based on Physiocrat themes for the ears of infant European monarchs. He sent it to Turgot for approval. Turgot told him to quit. He labelled the play plotless and prolix pedagogy, and misdirected as well. He combined here his own increasing sense of uselessness, isolation and unreality. "It is the public which must be instructed," not monarchs, for in the last analysis the public sets the framework in which the King and his assistants have to work. It would be better to be a journalist and teacher of minds than an isolated administrative pedant.² But what of this framework, the setting of possible action, yet to be created? It had failed to materialize in Limoges.

Turgot had not been able to set his own terms of reference,

¹ibid., pp. 504-11.

²ibid., pp. 480-2.

to create a social material with which he could work on the basis of his own basic notions about man and society. He also wrote a series of letters on justice and the law to a new friend, Condorcet. In these letters he became authoritarian, for that was the only way he could retain his ideas as authoritative; if his reforms were not applicable now, they have to be forced on the population anyway; he could not drop his whole outlook and renounce all his ideas about progress and reason. In those letters he systematically excluded everyone from participation in community affairs except those very few who at the same time had property and agreed absolutely on the ethical commands which would make for the progress of reasoning man. He further underlined his despair by emphasizing the black side of the conflicts which somehow produced lessons and progress. These were bad days, and his was a harsh duty: "Every time minds are divided [institutional and legal] forms are nothing, and one is exactly in a state of war."¹

By the early part of 1772 Turgot lost interest in almost everything associated with his job. His world had broken down, and he said so. Progress, cause enough of his own being, was nowhere evident to him. He showed no interest in his duties. He also remained virtually silent about the major crisis which was developing in Paris when Maupeau dismissed, he hoped forever, the parlements. Normally

¹ ibid., p. 536.

Turgot requested instant news from his Paris correspondents about any and all events at the centre. The exile of the magistrates certainly involved him very much, and in normal times he probably would have rejoiced at Maupeau's plans for thorough reform of the judicial structure. While all these events were occurring Turgot instead became still more introspective and doubting. His world view for once appeared to him as only a theory, an artificial and doubtful intellectual construct, as perhaps even a fantasy. Depressed and bored, frustrated and disgusted with his ideas and his job, he informed Du Pont that

it is easier to see the good in theory than to conform to it in practice. In theory one arranges things as they would become; in practice it depends on an thousand external circumstances that infinitely complicate themselves, which bring to birth some difficulties and even some impossibilities relative to the things one would want the most.¹

He turned away from forebodings about the correspondence of his theory with reality to extended discussions of issues completely inapplicable to his own problems. He wrote long letters to Condorcet--Du Pont being temporarily alienated--about current scientific debates. He studied the chemists; he offered an involved refutation of the theory of phlogiston; he studied the Aurora Borealis during the long evenings. He did long, involved experiments. Turgot especially spent many hours watching rock crystals form as water evaporated from various salt solutions. There, he

¹ibid., p. 562.

observed, in the slow, "infinitely complicated patterns" and chemical relationships, in the obscurities and mysteries of rock cultures lay as yet untapped depths of natural truth. He noted, too, a relaxing, therapeutic effect.¹ He wrote of how he longed to leave his own still unformed, muddy surroundings and rejoin the intellectual life in Paris, where clarity and order and purpose were certain. He also longed for old ties, friendship, and maybe some long lost chances of marriage and the security of a home. For the first time in over ten years he wrote to a woman, an old friend of the Paris years, Mlle. de Lespinasse. She was sick, he heard, and he wished her well.²

The famine and crisis in Limoges began to abate late in 1772. The end of the riots was at least in sight. The last of these took place early in 1773. Between times Turgot went to Paris. The escape and therapy he found in rock crystals and during his trip did him good. He returned more cheerful, once again full of purpose. He regained interest in his work and began to ask questions of Du Pont and Condorcet about the events surrounding the first partition of Poland and about happenings in Paris politics. He remained indifferent to Maupeau's coup, however, for Maupeau was a colleague of Terray, and both remained for Turgot the greatest enemies of the pedantic state. By the end of 1773 he had fully regained his sense of

¹ ibid., pp. 579-83.

² ibid., pp. 590-3.

justification and assurance. He turned his disillusionment into another revelation and reconfirmed the rightness of his own isolation. Duty was harsher than he had anticipated; stronger faith was necessary. Thus he was able confidently to inform Condorcet that his outlook was not just a theory, but a successful application of the principles of Newtonian physics to society, to history in general. Simultaneously he proceeded to draw all the old lessons of progress and laissez-faire afresh, with added emphasis.¹ He was ready for his most famous crusade, shorter and in a larger context, the new attempt to cut the knots of past errors, the Six Edicts.

Turgot broke down largely because external circumstances conflicted with his expectations. He was overworked, intensely so, and so fatigued that he was weakened. Among other things, he had to distribute charity, supervise hospitals and almshouses for dislocated tenant farmers, keep the peace in a time of distress, and in general witness much human suffering. But he did lose his sense of purpose because he lacked the energy or drive to meet these circumstances. If anything he worked harder than he had to, spending long hours translating difficult passages from Virgil, as well as navigating his way through eighteenth-century chemistry. He turned to poetry and the rest to try and prove that his suppositions about human nature, even

¹ibid., pp. 670-3, passim.

if only about his own make-up, were true. As always, he wanted to show himself that he at least was reasonable, if only by the fact of his difference; for few could successfully translate Latin odes. He depended on his ideology, and thus had to show himself that it was right.

Turgot's ideas about reasonable, economic, progressive everyman led him into despair. By combining these divers principles into a coherent system and by assimilating the ideas as elements of his personality he had staked his stability, virtually his life's work, on an understanding of his environment dubious under any historical circumstances. But by the same token the pattern of thought he had developed in time led him back out of his despair. By the process of revelation he was able to prove to himself that the very act of commitment to his ideas was the proof of the providential, prophetic and authoritative nature of his reforming vocation. His was thus a search for authority, a search for a way by which he could sanction as yet unaccepted economic and political changes taking place in France, and especially for a way by which he could give the weight of moral conviction to his own role of representing them. He tried desperately to knit a new set of sovereign abstractions into the minds and institutions of Frenchmen. He tried to do it peacably. Soon after his death the same outlook would be made a part of the web of French life violently. The social science in Turgot's thought lay in his recognition of the institutional needs of this relatively new way of life,

especially in his attempt to lay the ground for a relatively new kind of economic activity. But, contrary to Gay et. al., and contrary to Marx, this attempt at rational reform and critical evaluation of the mind was no more important than his search for a transcendent, a priori, final and omni-competent authority before which he could, pride intact, humble himself. No marxist, no romantic, and few religionists strove harder to achieve this experience, which is common to all religions and ideologies.

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