
Bernard Shaw, Philosopher
Author(s): Arthur H. Nethercot
Source: *PMLA*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Mar., 1954), pp. 57-75
Published by: [Modern Language Association](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/460127>
Accessed: 25/11/2013 17:43

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Language Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *PMLA*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

BERNARD SHAW, PHILOSOPHER

BY ARTHUR H. NETHERCOT

THE IRREVEREND and not always to be revered Frank Harris, in his book on Shaw, has sarcastically quoted Shaw's remark when the playwright was once told that he enjoyed a great reputation in America: "Which? I am a philosopher, novelist, sociologist, critic, statesman, dramatist, and theologian. I have therefore seven reputations." Conceding his willingness to make Shaw a present of the last six, Harris nevertheless maintained that for the life of him he couldn't see how Shaw got in as a philosopher—even a laughing philosopher. A court jester, perhaps, or a "wit of the first water." But being a philosopher entails, first, the formulation of a system of thought, and, second, the founding of a school of disciples to carry that thought on. Since, in spite of the "heaps of notes" Harris claimed to have gathered in a vain investigation of this subject, he could discover neither any system of thought nor any body of followers, he announced magisterially that, as a philosopher, Shaw "simply doesn't exist."

Yet in 1896, for example, in a review of the first volume of Nietzsche, just translated for the first time into English, Shaw began by happily insulting his readers with the gratuitous information that Nietzsche was a German philosopher, and that, since a philosopher was "something unintelligible to an Englishman," he would save them the difficulty of a definition by offering himself as an example: "To make my readers realize what a philosopher is, I can only say that *I* am a philosopher." The reason he had not been recognized as such was that his articles were so interesting. And the reason they were so interesting was that his philosophical materials were "humanity and the fine arts." The book-worm philosopher, who runs away from the world to his library and builds "some silly systematization of his worthless ideas over the abyss of his own nescience," is the one who brings his profession into disrepute. True philosophy comes from a completely open mind, uncluttered with convictions, and from an active life of intercourse with people, not a contemplative one. Even though Shaw's application of this theory of philosophy to his later works failed utterly to impress Harris, its results were sufficiently successful to convince at least Eric Bentley, who in his little book on Shaw, in discussing C. E. M. Joad's attempt to provide "a formal philosophical setting for Shaw's doctrines," concludes that at any rate Shaw might have made a good professor of philosophy. Incidentally, Shaw's own contempt for formal education and formal teachers is pretty well known.

Nevertheless, both Harris and Bentley are right—in part; and wrong—in part. In fact, where one is right the other is wrong, and vice versa. Shaw would never have made a good professor of philosophy, not only because of his temperament, but also because of the deficiency of his knowledge of philosophy and philosophers, which, as disclosed in his writings at least, is far too fragmentary and disorganized. On the other hand, he did evolve his own system of philosophy, which developed consistently over a long period of years and which, as he himself insisted, dominated his whole intellectual and artistic career.

Strange as it may seem Shaw started out, as he admits in his *Sixteen Self Sketches*, as an art-for-art's-sake man. But when he found he was getting nowhere under the domination of this creed, he became an artist-with-a-purpose, maintaining that "great art is never produced for its own sake." In 1899, after finishing *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, he had written to Ellen Terry about his intention to abandon practical plays and turn to "Shaw-philosophy." And by 1903, in the dedication to *Man and Superman*, he had found his new title. By this time, he said, "the artist-philosophers are the only sort of artists I take quite seriously." For many years he regularly referred to himself as one of these artist-philosophers; but by the 1920's he had found another classification which he preferred, but which by the 1940's he had replaced by still another, the climax of them all. These new titles will appear in their proper places a little later.

I

Amusingly enough, perhaps Shaw's first reference to philosophy is a characteristically flippant one. In his first novel, *Immaturity*, which he wrote in 1879 but did not get published till 1930, he described an incidental scene in Hyde Park with "a bearded gentleman, calling himself a Comprehensionist, who has discovered metaphysics for himself, and, being persuaded that his discovery was entirely new, called upon people to enrol themselves as Violet Volunteers for the promulgation of a home-made philosophy of the most abstract kind." But then Comprehensionism sinks out of sight in the story, and the nearest thereafter that Shaw comes to alluding to any real writer with the slightest philosophical pretensions is to have his hero and one of his semi-heroines mention La Rochefoucauld with some appreciation.

From this time on until his final literary composition just seventy years later a very large proportion of Shaw's references to philosophy is merely anecdotal in nature. In fact, many of these anecdotes turn up time after time, in widely different contexts, like the tried and true

flourishes of a practised orator. For instance, Socrates, the archetype of the wise man, repeats Shaw, was really invented by Plato. He served as a soldier, but did not remain one. Like Luther, Swedenborg, Blake, St. Francis, and St. Joan he saw visions. Like Jesus and Joan he made no valid or commonsense defense of himself at his trial, was condemned by his enemies, who were his intellectual and spiritual inferiors, and finally drank hemlock. Strangely enough, Xantippe plays a far less prominent role in Shaw's picture of Socrates' life than might have been expected.

On the other hand, Shaw draws careful attention to the views of other philosophers than Socrates on women and marriage. Not only did Kant and Newton never marry, but Nietzsche, who eventually went mad and who had an inexplicable taste for Bizet rather than Wagner, considered the plight of the married philosopher ridiculous and advised his readers, "When you go to women, take your whip with you." Schopenhauer had similarly splenetic opinions on women and their beauty; but the modern Don Juan has both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on his library shelves. Shaw's own experience with sexual desire, however, confirmed that of Rousseau rather than that of Wilde, since the latter "gave sixteen as the age at which sex begins," but the former "declared that his blood boiled with it from his birth."

Rousseau, who was "hunted from frontier to frontier" for his truth-telling, also helped earn his living by copying music, whereas Spinoza was forced to grind lenses for his. Hobbes, serving as a tutor to Charles II, performed the same function as Aristotle did for Alexander. Shaw, going to pose for Rodin, would not have done so if he had not thought his bust as important as the "busts of Plato which are now treasures of the museums which possess them." Descartes burned one of his books to escape being burned himself. The education of iconoclasts like Voltaire and Samuel Butler was completely conventional, one having been trained by the Jesuits and the other by a country parson; but their minds were strong enough to throw off this paralyzing influence. These biographical tidbits are typical of one aspect of Bernard Shaw the philosopher.

Over and over again Diderot, Voltaire, and Rousseau turn up as Encyclopedists who made Robespierre and the French Revolution as well as Napoleon possible; and Rousseau's Social Contract helped set the stage for the American Revolution. Although both Rousseau and Voltaire were excoriated in their time as atheists, they were really only Deists like Tom Paine; nevertheless, Shaw was taught at school that they were blasphemers "whose deathbeds were made frightful by the certainty of their going to hell." Yet Voltaire, an "advanced Congrega-

tionalist" or "Unitarian Deist," was for some time on very friendly terms with the pastors at Geneva, even though they finally had to conceal their essential agreement with him.

Certain famous sayings by certain famous philosophers also became part of Shaw's philosophical stock in trade. Voltaire's remark about the necessity of inventing God if God did not exist was often a bit of Shaw's philosophical small change. So was Voltaire's cynical, though Shaw thinks fallacious, reply to the poetaster who defended his writing with the plea that one must live: "I don't see the necessity." The Black Girl at the end of her long search for God was wise, thinks Shaw, to take Voltaire's advice and settle down to the cultivation of her garden. Voltaire's "pope," Monsieur Tout-le-monde, or Mr. Everybody, became a useful anti-democratic weapon in Shaw's arsenal; and he questions whether, if Voltaire had seen modern democracy at work, he would have maintained that if there is one person wiser than Mrs. Anybody it is Mrs. Everybody. Rather, believes Shaw, it is Mrs. Somebody's business to be able to pick the right people to govern the people.

Again and again, in discussing Christianity, Shaw agrees with Rousseau that it is only Christ's miracles which have kept the whole world from becoming Christian. On the other hand, he corrects Rousseau's assertion that man is born free, but becomes enslaved; no man in any "civilized state," insists Shaw, is ever born free. And whenever Shaw, or Don Juan, quotes Descartes' famous pronouncement, "I think; therefore I am," he does so with contempt and either calls the other "the foolish philosopher," or suggests that Mrs. Eddy's "I think I am ill; therefore I am ill" is "as near to Cartesianism as the letter E is to the letter D." Nevertheless, at times Shaw displays a clear attraction to Mrs. Eddy and her "Science" because of her belief in the power of mind over matter.

These anecdotal references and somewhat shopworn illustrative quotations are supplemented by many similar casual allusions for purposes of comparison and classification. As early as 1883 when Shaw wanted his unsocial Socialist, Trefusis, to make a contrast between the physical and the intellectual lives, he opposed a skillful girl skater to Plato, somewhat to Plato's disfavor; likewise in 1905, when Adolphus Cusins' best Greek pupil goes out to fight for Hellas, Dolly gives him a revolver and a hundred Undershaft cartridges rather than a copy of Plato's *Republic*. Generally, however, Plato, like many other philosophers, simply becomes a standard counter for some particular sort of mental activity. Plato and Solon become the highest type of lawgivers and citizens. Plato, Marx, Ruskin, Moses, and Inge are prophets and sages with utopian aspirations. Plato, Adam Smith, Voltaire, Aristotle, and Hobbes are not, after all, exactly representative of democracy and

the “people.” Plato, Marx, Ruskin, Confucius, Mahomet, Jesus, etc., all belong to the profession of “world betterer.” Education once believed that every child should be Plato, Aristotle, Einstein, Pythagoras, Newton, Leibniz, Cicero, etc., all rolled into one. Difficult writers like Hegel, Marx, Dante, and Aquinas should not be taught to children and dunces. In fact, the teaching of Descartes, Newton, Einstein, etc., in the schools has made many a child loathe all education, especially all mathematical processes and symbols. Yet Descartes, like Leibniz, Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Einstein, Giordano Bruno, and others (all conspicuous mathematicians), was a revolutionary intellectual pioneer who contributed much to the enlightenment and reform of civilization. On the other hand, great minds like those of Bacon, Aquinas, Einstein, Galileo, Dante, and Lenin would never have come to an agreement on any important matter. Other representative iconoclasts and skeptics include Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Montaigne, and Erasmus. Voltaire, Rousseau, and Hume are lumped with “any modern bishop” as skeptical critics of the Bible; and Colenso, Tyndall, and Hegel are grouped as being regarded by their time as destroyers of religion.

The intellectual revolution in the nineteenth century took many directions, but among its most important prophets—men with whose minds Shaw felt that his own had a special affinity—were Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Ibsen. In the scientific—especially the philosophico-biological—field the leaders were men like Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Tyndall, whose materialistic creed stemmed from classical writers like Lucretius, who, in spite of the fundamental error in his philosophy, afforded a significant step forward in man’s intellectual development, along with Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Plotinus, Thucydides, Gibbon, Voltaire, etc., etc. These, however, have all had to make way for the new creative evolutionary preachers from Buffon, Lamarck, and Goethe to Butler and Bergson, who would “offer to swallow the Bible ten times over” sooner than they would accept Darwin. Still, as late as the “Post-script” to the Galaxy Edition of *Back to Methuselah* in 1944, Shaw was broadminded enough to insist that true science must not only reject the dreadful nonsense of the mechanistic evolutionists, but must also not be satisfied with “mere erudition in the scriptures of the saints, prophets, and metaphysicians from Augustin and Aquinas to Butler and Bergson and Shaw.” As must have become evident, heterogeneous catalogues like these form a prominent aspect of Shaw’s rhetoric and dialectic.

II

By this time it probably seems that Shaw’s reading and thoughts have ranged far through the enchanting fields of both abstract and applied philosophy. As a matter of fact, however, in spite of the superficial im-

pression he creates, his range was not particularly wide nor did it go very deep. This conclusion is borne out more clearly when one tries to arrange his knowledge in any chronological, national, or theoretical fashion.

Little evidence of Shaw's knowledge of, or even interest in, philosophy during the eighties appears, in spite of the fact that in 1882, in his characterization of Lydia Carew, the bluestocking heroine of *Cashel Byron's Profession*, he explains that her wealthy and scholarly father had "made her acquainted with the works of Greek and German philosophers long before she understood the English into which she translated them." But her philosophical erudition remains delightfully vague with one exception: she contributes an article on Spinoza to a new biographical dictionary, an event which leads her enamoured highbrow footman, Bashville, to spend a whole hour in her library one day endeavoring to "unravel" that Dutch Portuguese Jew's philosophy. Since Spinoza remains practically unmentioned by Shaw from this time until 1949 when in the preface to *Farfetched Fables* he remarks that the polemics of Leibniz and Spinoza, as well as poems, music, etc., have never accomplished anything in the way of reformations or revolutions, it seems as if perhaps he had simply pulled the name of Spinoza out of a hat—or out of a biographical dictionary—as a useful one for his purpose without spending even as much time as Bashville did in getting acquainted with the other's ideas.

During this period of his life, of course, it was not theoretical philosophy that Shaw was concerned with. He had been plunged into the intellectual maelstrom of Zetetical Societies, Democratic Federations, Cobden Clubs, and Fabian Societies, where the new science, the new economics, and the new free thought elbowed each other for the front of the stage. As he himself put it in his Fabian Essay, "The Transition to Social Democracy," in 1889, "Numbers of young men, pupils of Mill, Spencer, Comte, and Darwin, roused by Mr. Henry George's 'Progress and Poverty,' left aside evolution and free thought: took to insurrectionary economics," and studied Karl Marx instead. So, in 1884, as he says in describing the ferment of this period in his *Self Sketches*, he persuaded Sidney Webb to join the Fabians, "Marx having convinced me that what the movement needed was not Hegelian theorizing but an unveiling of the facts of Capitalist civilization." Obviously, therefore, it was the Hegelian dialectic and the Hegelian views of the perfect state, which he further developed in the *Fabian Essays*, that concerned him rather than such abstruse conceptions as those of the phenomenology of the spirit.

In the nineties, too, Shaw's references to the philosophers are rela-

tively rare, and are confined to a few favorites whom he was just getting acquainted with, such as Butler, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer. Only in the twentieth century do these references begin to expand and diversify, but they still do not go very deep.

Lydia Carew had become familiar with the Greeks and the Germans very young. Shaw had mentioned Plato in 1883, when he was twenty-seven, but not until he published *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891 did he say anything which was in the slightest degree specific about him—and then he used him very incidentally in connection with Ibsen to suggest that the term “realism” should be properly associated with Plato rather than with Zola and Maupassant, to allude to Ibsen’s Emperor Julian’s ridiculous speeches quoting Plato, and to point out that Plato, “and, following him, Sir Thomas More, saw with Ibsen on the use of precious metals.” Then, until 1900, Plato practically disappears: to turn up with some frequency in the twentieth century as a sort of standard authority on such matters as the selection and training of governors (always “choose the reluctant man”), the value of music in republican education, the conception of Platonic love, the nature of the real and the ideal, and the effectiveness of the Dialogues as a dramatic form. Naturally Shaw would be attracted to (and would somewhat exaggerate) the Communistic aspects of Plato’s utopian state, and in *On the Rocks* even have Prime Minister Chavender’s new Marxist program strike the Duke of Domesday as “first rate Platonic Communism.” Shaw also saw a strong similarity between the Communism of Plato and the Communism of Christ. He sometimes mentioned Plato, Christ, and Confucius together as moral leaders and teachers. (Shaw, in general, seems to have been little drawn to the Oriental philosophers, though he does refer once or twice to Lao Tse and Gautama—a form he prefers to Buddha—as well as to Confucius, after whom he names his sage Chinese administrator in *Methusalem*. It seems, too, as if he had been reading Indian works such as the Vedanta when he was writing *Too True To Be Good* and *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* in the thirties.) But the main debt of our own time to Plato, according to Shaw, was that he tried “to knock some sense” into the Athens of his day and that he kept the “human mind open for the thought of the universe as one idea.”

The only other classical philosophers Shaw seems to have known anything much about were Socrates, Aristotle, Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius, and Pythagoras—if the last belongs in the philosophical category. Shaw in one passage in *Everybody’s Political What’s What?* associates him with Aristotle, Leibniz, and other learned men, but more characteristically he agrees with St. Joan’s antagonist, the Archbishop of Rheims, that Pythagoras was a sage who held that the earth is round

and moves about the sun. Shaw also suggests that Newton might profitably have asked Pythagoras some questions about apples. Socrates he does not mention until in the preface to *Man and Superman* he quips that the other was invented by Plato, nor does he ever say anything directly about Socrates' philosophy. Aristotle, too, appears late and infrequently, and is associated with such matters as the medieval theology of Aquinas, the classification of animals, and the principles of the drama. Shaw's most philosophical Aristotelian reference is one to the effect that the doctrine that subsistence comes first and virtue afterward is as old as Aristotle and as new as *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. Shaw has heard of Lucretius as a materialistic, mechanistic physicist of the Tyndall school, who has produced some noble poetry. As for Marcus Aurelius, Joey Percival in *Misalliance* recommends him to the omnivorous underwear manufacturer Tarleton, who apparently, to judge from his conversation, has read practically everything except the philosophers.

The German philosophers who meant so much to Lydia Carew had little overt effect on Shaw's writing until the nineties. Up to the time of the *Quintessence* Hegel is the only one mentioned at all prominently. By 1891, however, Shaw had discovered Haeckel and Schopenhauer particularly. Haeckel he rejected because he could not find in his Materialism—any more than he could in the Materialism of Darwin, Helmholtz, Young, Tyndall, and Huxley—any explanation of the “fact of consciousness,” which to Shaw was indispensable to any valid commentary on the truth of life. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, he praised as the first among the moderns to recognize the vital difference between the will and the reason, and therefore to escape the worst pitfalls of mere Rationalism. But, although praising Schopenhauer's metaphysics, he also warned against accepting his pessimistic philosophy, especially his views of life as not worth living. This distinction Shaw continued to make in his reviews of books and plays, his letters, his prefaces, and his books on *The Sanity of Art*, *The Perfect Wagnerite*, etc. While maintaining that so far as the English were concerned, he himself was responsible for calling attention to the opposition between will and intellect, and while insisting on his own originality and independence of thought, which made him along with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and others merely part of a spontaneous world movement, he recognized Schopenhauer as one of those “whose peculiar sense of the world” was “more or less akin” to his own. Although Shaw makes various incidental allusions to Schopenhauer's views on women, on the desirability of infanticide, and on the conflict between the “Covenant of Grace” and the “Covenant of Works,” he is chiefly impressed by the other's “metaphysiology” in *The World as*

Will and Representation, which he calls the “metaphysical complement to Lamarck’s natural history.”

Shaw continued to refer sporadically to Hegel in agreeing with his dictum that we learn from history that men never learn from history and to admit that Marx’s metaphysical dialectic was inherited from Hegel. But although he pointed out that the “metaphysical literature” of the Third International began with Hegel and Feuerbach, he violently criticized the doctrine that Marxism could be a safe guide to the practice of government, since it gets “no nearer to a definition of Socialism than as a Hegelian category in which the contradictions of Capitalism shall be reconciled, and in which political power shall have passed to the proletariat.” Shaw did not trust the proletariat that far.

Kant seems to have meant little to Shaw until the twentieth century had got under way. Then he begins to talk about the “Kantian test” and the “abstract Categorical Imperative,” about a “criticism (in the Kantian sense) of an established body of belief,” and about Kant’s “two wonders of the starry heavens above us and the moral law within us,” which “makes you conceive your God as a judge.” By the last years of his life, however, Shaw had become able to assimilate and reconcile several diverse points of view with his own, for in his *Self Sketches* he concluded that what Kant had called the Categorical Imperative and Shakespeare had called the “Divinity that shapes our ends,” Bergson had called the *Élan Vital*.

Leibniz Shaw apparently did not discover until relatively late. He was fond of pointing out that Newton was ashamed of inventing the infinitesimal calculus until Leibniz made it fashionable, and in *The Black Girl* he has some low fun about getting a solution to the old puzzler of extracting the “square root of Myna’s sex,” a problem which the English travelers associate with Newton, Leibniz, and Einstein. Realizing, however, from the time of *Methuselah* that philosophers like Plato and Leibniz had preached the thought of the universe as a single idea, Shaw finally concluded that the philosophy he himself had come to believe was essentially that of Leibniz, for in the preface to *Farfetched Fables*, which is Shaw’s remarkable philosophical last will and testament, he wrote modestly: “For instance I am much less mentally gifted than, say, Leibniz, and can only have been needed because, as he was so unintelligible to the mob, it remained for some simpler soul like myself to translate his nomads [this spelling we hope should be attributed to the printer] and his universal substance, as he called the Life Force, into fables which, however farfetched, can at least interest, amuse, and perhaps enlighten those capable of such entertainment.”

But the German philosopher who stimulated Shaw the most, to judge

by the number and tone of the references to him, was of course Nietzsche. Yet Shaw resented and vociferously denied any suggestions that he got any of his basic ideas from Nietzsche any more than he did from Ibsen or Schopenhauer—although he felt that Nietzsche himself had learnt a lesson or two from Schopenhauer. In the preface to *Major Barbara* in 1905 Shaw first publicly set his maligners right, by stating: “I first heard the name of Nietzsche from a German mathematician, Miss Borhardt, who had read my Quintessence of Ibsenism, and told me that she saw what I had been reading: namely, Nietzsche’s *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*.” This he explains he could not have done, because at that time (about 1892) he could not read German with any comfort. This denial he repeated in a footnote to the 1912 expansion of the *Quintessence*; and there is no reason to doubt him. But when the translation of the first volume of Nietzsche appeared in 1896, Shaw promptly wrote a rather flippant review, praising the other for his wit and iconoclasm, but blaming him for his frequent ignorance, bad taste, and prejudices in various matters. And when the second volume came out in 1899 Shaw reviewed it also, but continued to assert his own precedence, which he expressed with “After the dramatist came the philosopher. In England, G.B.S.; in Germany, Nietzsche.” Nevertheless, in his work-room on Adelphi Terrace Shaw placed a portrait of Nietzsche, along with similar tributes to Descartes, Strindberg, and Einstein.

Shaw’s first printed mention of Nietzsche came in 1895, when in his *Sanity of Art*, his reply to Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, he quoted Nordau to the effect that Nietzsche “belongs, body and soul, to the flock of mangy sheep”—i.e., the degenerate modern artists. From that time on, references are rife, running all the way from casual remarks about the necessity of tolerating works such as Nietzsche’s “*Gay Science*” because for all we know they may turn out to be right, to statements that the modern Don Juan reads Nietzsche and Schopenhauer instead of Ovid, and to comparisons of Nietzsche’s startling confessions and personal revelations with those of St. Paul; he also finds a similarity between some of the views of Nietzsche and Bunyan, two others of those men whose “peculiar sense of the world” he recognized as “more or less akin” to his own. Nietzsche’s friendship and then quarrel with Wagner, another of Shaw’s idols, likewise elicited his comment. But the main ideas that engaged his attention were, as Higgins described the philosophy of Alf Doolittle, his “Nietzschean transcendence of good and evil,” his iconoclastic but still not original views on Christianity as a “slave morality,” his doctrines as a Vitalist philosopher on the Will to Power (which are reflected in Andrew Undershaft and Bishop Cauchon), and his preaching of the coming Superman. Admitting that he borrowed his own word,

Superman, from Nietzsche, he also defended the other from the common charges that his "Übermensch" was simply a "big blonde beast," and that the Kaiser in World War I was a disciple of Nietzsche, "who would have laughed his childish pietism to scorn." This misinterpretation of Nietzsche, Shaw feared in 1944, might well be leading to "an idolatry of imaginary Carlylean heroes and bogus Nietzschean supermen." But he also traced the idea of the Superman back much further: Michael Angelo had "painted a Superman three hundred years before Nietzsche wrote *Also Sprach Zarathustra*," and even Siegfried, as depicted by Wagner, is "a totally unmoral person, a born anarchist, the ideal of Bakoonin, an anticipation of the 'overman' of Nietzsche." No, said Shaw in the preface to *Man and Superman* (which actually contains no Superman, who, as the Devil speaks of this conception in the Hell scene in the play itself, is still to come), the cry for a Superman did not begin with Nietzsche, nor will it end with his vogue.

Shaw undeniably had a great deal to do with the vogue of Nietzsche in England. In 1903, when the nicely conventional young American, Hector Malone, Jr., finds people in English drawing rooms chattering about Nietzsche and Anatole France, he annihilates them by insisting on talking about Matthew Arnold, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Macaulay. In 1911, in *Fanny's First Play*, the drama critic Trotter, who stands for the dedicatee of *Man and Superman*, Shaw's fellow critic, A. B. Walkley, is frantic about the possibility of being regarded as a "Nietzschean!! Perhaps a Shavian!!!" Yet, in a surprisingly candid admission made as early as 1905 in a letter to Henderson, quoted by Rattray, Shaw confessed, "The truth is that I am rather an impostor as a pundit on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche." This confession, perhaps, should be extended even more broadly and generally, and not confined to these two philosophers.

The French philosophers began to attract Shaw fairly early. A positivist like Comte, who in the eighties could show him the scientific approach to sociology and give him something of a philosophy of history and government, might be more or less discarded afterward, but as late as 1897 he could admit that his enemy Robert Buchanan in his attack on him was "altogether right in identifying my views with his father's Owenism; only I claim that Comte's law of the three stages has been operating busily since Owen's time, and that modern Fabianism represents the positive stage of Owenism." In 1910 he could refer approvingly to Comte's analysis of the potentialities of an "intelligently worked Capitalist system," in spite of the fact that already, in an article on "The Class War" in *The Clarion* in 1904, while announcing his own rejection of the Marxian theory of a class war, he had referred to "middle-

class paper theorists like Malthus, Cobden, Marx, Comte, and Herbert Spencer—fine fellows, all of them, but stupendously ignorant of the industrial world.”

In Voltaire, however, Shaw found a much more permanent kindred spirit, even though in 1903 he did remark, “I rail at the theistic credulities of Voltaire.” But the Black Girl in 1933 could describe Voltaire’s face as “all intelligence” and attribute a philosophy of creative evolution to him, and in 1921 Shaw could have his young longlivers in A.D. 31,920 engage in a violent dispute on Voltaire, which, along with Jove, was one of the names under which the story of the early biological experimenter who in a cultivated garden first breathed into matter “the breath of life” has come down to them. Voltaire’s jests at Bible worship and his laughter at Habbakuk were just the sort of thing that Shaw had heard bandied about between his tipling father and his irreverent free-thinking uncle in the household back in Dublin when he was a boy—and yet he admitted that, so far as most of Western Civilization was concerned, the Bible had stood up against Voltaire’s “rationalistic battery.” Admitting that Voltaire in his mock epic, *La Pucelle*, should not have made Joan’s father a priest, and refusing to defend the satire against the charge of “extravagant indecorum,” he still defended Voltaire’s anti-Clerical intentions in writing it. He praised Voltaire’s biographical abilities in giving “in two pages all you need to know about Molière’s private life,” and he called *Candide* an unanswerable indictment of the wickedness of mankind. Voltaire’s influence on the course of human thought was tremendous.

In his *Self Sketches* Shaw maintained that he was “one of the very few people who have read Rousseau’s confessions through to the end,” and remarked that as soon as Rousseau changed from “a rather rascally young adventurer” to the mature “great Rousseau” the book tells “next to nothing of any importance” about the man’s actual life. Amusingly enough, Rousseau is also one of the few modern authors that Lubin (i.e., Asquith), the classicist politician in *Melhuselah*, has looked at. Shaw mentions Rousseau’s “very ridiculous confessions” on the subject of child whipping, and praises him for telling the truth “by an extraordinary effort, aided by a superhuman faculty for human natural history,” but adds that, after all, the facts that he revealed mattered very little. Rousseau, to Shaw, was another critic who would have trimmed away some of the more fanciful portions of the Bible. Essentially, however, he was a hero to Shaw because he, like Voltaire and Diderot, was the “revolutionary predecessor” to Karl Marx.

Though Shaw would naturally have little regard philosophically for a man like Descartes, “now claimed as the father of the neo-Darwinian-Weismann-Pavlov School of Determinist physics,” in *Everybody’s Politi-*

cal What's What? he admits that the other "might justly be classed as the Archmetaphysicist on the strength of his famous 'I think; therefore I am'." In the postscript to *Methuselah* he grants, too, that Descartes and Galileo undoubtedly knew more about physics than Moses did; and in *Buoyant Billions*, in a passage praising the role played by great mathematicians like Descartes in the enlightenment of civilization, he lets Secondborn insist that a mathematical hormone will yet be discovered, and acclaim the intellectual ecstasy to be obtained through mathematical passion and contemplation—which is the prime occupation of the Ancients in *Methuselah*. Remember, too, the portrait of Descartes in Shaw's study.

His references to another great mathematician and religious philosopher practically complete Shaw's French gallery. In discussing in the preface to *Androcles* the incredibility of the traditional conceptions of the composition of such parts of the Bible as Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch, Shaw cites the similarly peculiar case of the posthumous writing of Pascal's *Thoughts*. And in *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, after Louise de K  roualle has proclaimed that "a great French philosopher, Blaise Pascal," has taught her never to let her imagination run away with her, Newton points out that Pascal's scientific advice was anticipated by the Englishman, Bacon.

And what of the English group? Shaw refers to Bacon only rarely and briefly, as a man who did not accept authority and thought for himself. He mentions Locke's essay "On Human Understanding." Hobbes, an intellectual and certainly not one of the "people," becomes simply an example of the fallible processes of historical memory in *Methuselah*, where the Elderly Gentleman mentions *The Leviathan*, by Jonhobsnoxius, an attempt to reproduce the Perfect City of God as described by Thucyderodotus Macollybuckle. Although Newton appears as a main character in *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* and is described by all kinds of people as an "eminent philosopher" or "the infidel philosopher," he is generally mentioned by Shaw in connection with Leibniz or Einstein as a mathematician. Lord Shaftesbury, according to the preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, was simply a man who devoted his life, almost in vain, to the exposure of social evils. Hume's rationalism, so far as Shaw was concerned, was leveled entirely at some of the irrational things in the Bible, such as the account of Joshua's impossible campaigns. Though English Hegelians like Green and Bosanquet very probably influenced Fabian thought, Shaw apparently does not mention them.

Again with one exception, Herbert Spencer was the one English philosopher who made much of an impression on Shaw. The impression was a youthful one, however, and soon Spencer came to represent an attitude

toward life and society that, as Shaw attained maturity and his own philosophy, he quickly outgrew. As he admits in his *Self Sketches*, in the days of the old Zetetical Society, Spencer, Malthus, Ingersoll, and Darwin were held in special reverence, and the works of Tyndall, Huxley, and Eliot (as well as Lewes) were owned by every member. But by the time of the *Quintessence* Shaw is able to make an ironical allusion to the way one can lose one's faith even in vaccination and Spencer's *Data of Ethics*. A few years later in "The Illusions of Socialism" he is laughing at the Individualism expressed in Spencer's *The Coming Slavery*. In *You Never Can Tell* the next year the likable but outdated old lawyer McComas calls himself a "Philosophical Radical, standing for liberty and the rights of the individual, as I learnt from my master Herbert Spencer," and Mrs. Clandon, the once—but now old—New Woman who is already writing treatises about the Twentieth Century, continues to think herself advanced because she champions the same antiquated "liberal" school. In *Man and Superman* Roebuck Ramsden, a philosophical descendant of McComas and Mrs. Clandon, has busts of Spencer and John Bright placed prominently in his study, and Shaw continues to call attention to these in his stage directions, though their names are not mentioned in the dialogue. In *Misalliance* Joey Percival's father is said to have "kept a tame philosopher in the house: a sort of Coleridge or Herbert Spencer kind of card," who was a freethinker and always believed the latest thing. All this time, and on until 1931 in the preface to *Too True*, Shaw is alluding to Spencer's *Social Statics*, to his "essays on the laxity of the morals of trade," to his warning people against a craze for work, to his disbelief in coercion, and to his having lived "to write despairing pamphlets against the Socialism of his ablest pupils." But after 1931 Spencer practically disappears behind the Shavian horizon.

As for his own contemporaries, Shaw mentions Bertrand Russell in *Everybody's Political What's What?* as an "eminent mathematician." Shaw was a good friend of the philosopher-theologian, Dean Inge, who was the original of the pessimistic Elder, the disappointed rationalist Determinist, in *Too True*, and who wrote the chapter on Shaw as a theologian in *G.B.S. 90*. In 1922 in a review of the second volume of Inge's *Outspoken Essays* Shaw remarked concerning Inge's religious paradoxes: "It is the oddest experience to find the real Inge . . . smashing this heathenish nonsense with one contemptuous punch of his pen, and then suddenly relapsing into the Cambridge classroom and assuring us that there is nothing for us to do but wait as best we can until our extinction is completed by the cooling of the sun." Similarly in *Everybody's Political What's What?* he compares the attempts of the Jainists to explain their materialist worship of an immaterialistic God with "Dean

Inge trying to explain away St Paul." Nevertheless, in his *Self Sketches* he cites Inge as representing the culmination of liberal religious thought stemming from another of his favorites, Bishop Colenso. Finally, Joad swims into the Shavian ken only in the forties, when he is praised along with Wells, Aldous Huxley, and Shaw himself as making possible the coming of "the devil knows who in England." Stephen Winsten entrusted to Joad the task of writing about Shaw's philosophy in *G.B.S.* 90.

In 1944, too, in the postscript to *Methuselah* and the *Political What's What?* Shaw discovers his only Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, whom he associates particularly with the English Cobden. He remarks, for instance, that "In the nineteenth century we reacted from an effete feudalism into a Cobden-Croce world in which the love of money is the root of all good," and that in a Communist society Cobdenism may some day revive enough "to canonize Benedetto Croce beside Karl Marx." He adds that Croce was right in preaching that "Liberty is a key to history," but insists that Mussolini (whom Shaw heroized at the time) was equally right in calling it a "stinking corpse." He advises, too, that the modern statesman might well look at the works of Croce, who "abhors classification."

III

Nowhere in this array of philosophers—and only well-known philosophers, be it noted—does Shaw engage in any real critique, any discussion or analysis or interpretation, of any length concerning these men or their ideas. His references to individuals or their works are sporadic and spasmodic. They illustrate, they exemplify, they analogize, they point up a generalization. But their philosophical systems are never examined or evaluated with any thoroughness. From time to time, it is true, he devotes incidental passages to pointing out the weaknesses of such general schools as Hedonism, Stoicism, and Pragmatism (without mentioning the names of exponents like Epicurus, Zeno, James, Schiller, or Dewey), or to exposing the "twaddle" of the Materialists and the Rationalists, or to announcing that "soulless Determinism has nearly passed away." Only in the article "What Is My Religious Faith?" in the *Self Sketches*, when he examines such creeds as Atheism, Rationalism, Materialism, Vitalism, and Evolution, does he approach anything like a philosophical discussion. He does not even mention in so many words the concepts of Dualism and Monism, whose tenets and whose conflict are implicit in so much of his own work.

Like most dialectical writers, Shaw was always very fond of using contrasts, antitheses, and dichotomies. As early as *The Irrational Knot* he begins to let such diverse characters as Douglas, Marian, and Nelly

McQuinch voice his favorite idea about instinct being better than reason, though his hero, Conolly, seems to act on the opposite assumption. In *Cashel Byron's Profession* Lydia at the end of the story sums up her prospective husband, Cashel, as "the man of emotion who never thinks" and herself as "the woman of introspection, who cannot help thinking." In *An Unsocial Socialist* there is considerable juxtaposing of asceticism vs. love, intuition vs. reason, and mind vs. body. When Shaw begins to write plays he continues his antitheses. In *Candida* Marchbanks lectures Morell about souls and bodies, a topic which in *Major Barbara* turns into hungry souls and full bodies, the latter of which is a preliminary to the satisfaction of the former. In *Caesar and Cleopatra* it is dust vs. life. In *Getting Married*, Mrs. George, speaking in her trance as the symbol and incarnation of Woman, tells her male listeners: "I gave you your own soul: you ask me for my body as a plaything." In *Misalliance* Bentley, Johnny, and Joey Percival represent different proportions and combinations of brains and body, and in *Androcles* the Lion and Ferrovius represent the physical strength and power which form the proper supplement to the spiritual and humane strength of Androcles. In *Heartbreak House* old Captain Shotover and Hector Hushabye discuss materialism vs. aspiration, and the divine spark. In *Man and Superman* the Devil and Juan discuss the Life Force vs. the Death Force, and Tanner-Juan argues for the spending of eternity (where there are no longer any corporeal bodies) in pure contemplation, not in the worldly search for happiness, the object of the Life Force being brains, or the Philosophic Man. In the last part of *Methuselah* the Maiden is losing all heart and feeling and turning to pure cogitation; intensity of mind is stamped on the Ancients in contrast to "pretty-pretty sculpture"; and the Ancients talk about discarding the body entirely, since not even the brain is the real self. Thought is a vortex and only thought will remain, so that, millennia in the future, no spoken or written communication will be necessary, since direct apprehension will take its place. So, in the final vision of Lilit, life will at last disengage itself completely from matter, and man will have achieved Superhumanity. As Shaw puts it, in making his own corrections of André Maurois' essay on him and his philosophy in *Prophets and Poets*, "and here we leave all real existence behind, to fall back into an extreme neo-Platonism and neo-Thomism." So, in *Farfetched Fables*, Shaw's dramatic last word and testament, the Hermaphrodite harangues on his fervent and inherent desire to get rid of physical bodies: "I don't want to be a body: I want to be a mind and nothing but a mind." Thus, a few centuries later, some people have actually got rid of their bodies and have become "Disembodied Races," which "still exist as Thought Vortexes." Finally, temporarily reversing the process, Raphael, a Thought

Vortex, embodies himself as a specimen of the process, and Shaw's only fully realized Superman has at last appeared. Maya, the symbol of illusion in the *Simpleton*, Hootchli-poochli and Poochli-hoochli—the god-of-good-and-evil vs. the god-of-evil in *Buoyant Billions*—have vanished. For there can no longer be illusion when man has at last achieved direct apprehension of reality.

Similarly in the non-dramatic works—the prefaces, reviews, political, economic, and religious guides and parables—Shaw pressed home the same theme, although in the preface to *Too True* and other places he insisted that he himself was no ascetic. But in *The Black Girl* the mythological gods are said to have put on humanity for us, and to have taken the bodies of men; and there has been a progression in belief to “the spirit without body, parts, or passions; and finally to the definition of that spirit in the words God is Love.” (Here Shaw is alluding to one of his favorite, but usually ironical, illustrations: the first of the famous Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, about God's incorporeality, which is then promptly contradicted by most of the rest of the Articles.) In the *Political What's What?*, expanding what he had said in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide* on the soul being more important than material gain, he had stated that his belief in Creative Evolution made him a religious person, “that is to say, a person to whom eating, drinking and reproduction are irksome necessities in comparison with the urge to a wider and deeper knowledge. . . .” Unlike his namesake, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, he asserted his belief that he and his body would be “depersonalized and replaced by something better.” For him there was no “Problem of Evil,” which apparently “reduces the goodness of God to an absurdity.” This whole problem of two forces, one of good and one of evil, one of the spirit and one of the body, he focused in the preface to the *Fables*: “At first, however, this setting up against God of a rival deity with a contrary ideology was resented as a Manichean heresy, because plague, pestilence and famine, battle, murder and sudden death, were not regarded with horror as the work of Shelley's Almighty Fiend, but with awe as evidence of the terrible greatness of God.” These dualistic problems fade away, however, with the recognition of the truth of Shaw's own professed and essentially monistic philosophy, or religion (to him they ultimately become the same): Creative Evolution, the doctrine that something innate in life itself makes it strive for self-betterment, though this Life Force is not omniscient or omnipotent; its method is a sort of trial-and-error, perhaps, but eventually its groping experiments will attain its end, the escape from matter and the realization of pure mind and spirit.

The particular prophets of this creed, of course, other than Shaw himself, have been Samuel Butler and Henri Bergson. In this respect, Butler

became one of Shaw's earliest heroes. In 1887, when he wrote a review of Butler's *Luck or Cunning?*, entitled "Darwin Denounced," he was not yet ready to commit himself entirely to either Lamarck or Butler, but he knew he rejected Darwin. He continued to refer frequently and with general approval to most of Butler's works—to "The Authoress of the Odyssey," to *Erewhon* and its doctrine that sin is a disease and its consequent conclusions about the treatment of crime, and to *The Way of All Flesh* and its creed of a Laodicean attitude toward life. Commonest of all, however, is the constant antagonism he reiterates between Butler and Darwin, whose doctrine of Natural Selection, according to Butler, has banished mind from the universe. But though he insisted that Butler has anticipated Nietzsche and confessed his own indebtedness to Butler in exposing the pernicious fallacies of Darwinism, he denied to Maurois that he owed any other of his ideas to Butler, similar as they were on many subjects.

Strangely enough, although Bergson began publishing his views on time, duration, change, and being at the end of the eighties and printed his *L'évolution créatrice* in 1907, Shaw apparently gives no written evidences of being familiar with his work until 1912, when in a footnote in the expanded version of the *Quintessence* he remarks, rather loosely, that the world movement started by Schopenhauer, Wagner, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Strindberg "is alive today in the philosophy of Bergson and the plays of Gorki, Tchekoff, and the post-Ibsen English Drama." Not long thereafter he became somewhat more specific in his note to *Androcles*, where he referred rather sardonically to one type of contemporary clergyman as "the more modern sort of Anglican Theosophist to whom the Holy Ghost is the Élan Vital of Bergson," and then in his tremendous preface to the same play continued the discussion as part of his "higher criticism" of the Bible and of "evolutionary preachers, from Buffon and Goethe to Butler and Bergson." By 1918 he is referring easily to the "Creative Evolutionists, with Butler and Bergson for their prophets," and by 1919, in the preface to *Heartbreak House*, he is grouping Bergson, Butler, and Scott Haldane as "revolutionary biologists." There is a great deal of talk in *Melhuselah*, preface and play, as there was in *Man and Superman*, about the Life Force, Élan Vital, Creative Evolution, etc., but Bergson's specific role is neglected. In fact, nowhere, it seems, does Shaw mention by title any individual work of Bergson. Nevertheless, admitting in various passages during the thirties and forties that Creative Evolution is only a "provisional hypothesis," although the most sensible yet advanced, Shaw the nonagenarian sums up his whole intellectual development in his *Self Sketches*. Writing of his religious faith, he states: "And so, as Bergson is the established philosopher of my sect,

I set myself down as a Creative Evolutionist.” Then, correcting one of the “blunders” of Duffin, he proclaims: “There is a studied theory of Creative Evolution behind all my work. . . . It is the faith of Butler and Bergson.”

In this way, then, Shaw would have established his right to be called a philosopher, as he had warned Ellen Terry and the readers of his review of Nietzsche a half century before. Yet, although he continued to list himself among the “artist-philosophers,” he found new changes to ring on the classification as time went on. When he wrote his preface to *Methuselah* in 1921 he had become an “artist-prophet,” along with such heroes of his as Michael Angelo and Beethoven. But by his postscript to the same work in 1944 he had added a new element or emphasis: he was now also a “born artist-biologist struggling to take biology a step forward on its way to positive science from its present metaphysical stage.” And so he remained in his *Self Sketches*: the artist-philosopher-prophet-biologist—a truly protean, dumfounding man.

Against all discouragement and despite his failure to make any notable converts, Shaw persisted in proclaiming that Creative Evolution, to which he had attempted to give a mythology and an iconography in *Back to Methuselah*, was “the religion of the twentieth century” and the future. But Lamarck is dead. Butler is dead. Bergson is dead. Shaw is dead. What militant disciple remains to carry the gospel to the gentiles?

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Evanston, Illinois