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*Anatomies of Foolishness 1927–1937*

THE PHILOSOPHY of intellectual vices and virtues, of cognitive goods and evils, values and disvalues, and of foolishness does not display many high-points. Aristotle's account of non-ethical virtues and vices, medieval developments of this account, Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* and Descartes' reflections on the search for certainty are among the main contributions to such a philosophy.

The decade which begins in 1927 is marked by an unusual surge of interest in attitudes towards the values of *truth*, *reason*, *knowledge* and *clarity*. In that year Julien Benda publishes *La Trahison des clercs* (The Treason of the Clerisy), a treason due to the desire to abase the values of knowledge before the values of action. Ten years later Robert Musil publishes his address "Über die Dummheit" (On Stupidity). In between, a remarkable number of investigations of our relations to the disvalues of error, illusion, falsity, sham beliefs and inexactness appear.

In what follows I have two goals. First, to *determine* what can be learned from these investigations about what I shall call foolishness. Second, to *identify* an important aspect of twentieth century thought which is invariably overlooked. It is important to distinguish the first goal from a quite different project, that of evaluating the claims made by our thinkers about the bearers of cognitive vice and foolishness. Many

of the writings to be considered belong to the genre of cultural and political criticism. We are told that this or that thinker, this or that part of some population is cognitively vicious. Such claims are, as philosophers say, empirical claims, that is, of little interest to philosophers. What interests me here is not the truth or falsity of such claims but the understanding of our relations to cognitive values which is to be found in the writings to be considered. This distinction is not always easy to respect. Some of our anatomists of foolishness take other philosophers, thinkers and artists to be on the side of cognitive vice. And, of course, it is one thing for a philosopher to be on the side of cognitive vice, to defend it, and another thing to be cognitively vicious. But matters are slightly more complicated than this might suggest. Some of our anatomists merrily claim that large swathes of the population are indifferent to the value of reason, an empirical claim, sometimes because, like Nietzsche and William James, they are interested in what happens when people live according to this or that philosophy. Similarly, it is sometimes claimed that many of us in the West live as the philosophies of Postmodernism tell us to live. But the evaluation of such an empirical claim cannot avoid investigating the philosophical claims of Postmodernism.

I first (§1) survey some of the main contributions to my topic, then (§2) consider in more detail the writings of Julien Benda and José Ortega y Gasset<sup>1</sup>. Finally (§3), I examine two different accounts of foolishness and their relations to what our anatomists have to say.

### §1 *Survey*

In 1930 José Ortega y Gasset's *La Rebelión de la Masas* (The Revolt of the Masses) describes "mass-man" in terms of his relations to cognitive values or norms. Ortega wonders why there is still no study of our contact with the foolishness (*tontería*) of others:

I often asked myself the following question. There is no doubt that at all times, for many men, one of the greatest tortures of their lives has been the

contact, the collision with the folly of their neighbours. And yet how is it that there has never been attempted – I think this is so – a study on this matter, an *Essay on Folly*? For the pages of Erasmus do not treat of this aspect of the matter<sup>2</sup>.

The first parts of Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* (1930 and 1933) present and analyse an extraordinary variety of fools and foolishness from the points of view of a narrator and hero who display a great interest in many normative matters but often seem to believe in little else than precision, reason and clarity.

In 1932 the great German literary critic and future author of *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Ernst Robert Curtius, publishes *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*, in order to attack the relativism and sociologism of Karl Mannheim and the climate it expresses and grows out of. Already in 1927 Curtius had pleaded, somewhat effusively, for a “restoration of reason”, and depicted “the anarchic state of European *Intelligenz*”, “the incursion of democracy into the realm of the soul”, in which “all differences of value have been effaced”. Irony, he notes, “is one of the methods” which might help “to clean up our spiritual chaos”, for “irony is an aspect of reason”<sup>3</sup>. Germany in 1932, Curtius thinks, has turned its back on *Bildung* and the will to know which belongs to it, has begun to destroy culture and deny value to reason. Irrationalism is everywhere, particularly in the “hatred of Geist and reason of a certain pseudo-romantic tendency in contemporary philosophy”<sup>4</sup>, presumably the philosophies of Spengler, Klages and Lessing. The destruction of culture is the expression of a political hatred of culture, which comes in many forms. The new nationalist myth in Germany rejects *Geist* and culture and their autonomy; the intellectuals who propagate the myth are traitors to *Geist*, says Curtius, referring to Benda's critique of nationalism in *La Trahison des Clercs*<sup>5</sup>.

Karl Mannheim's 1929 *Ideologie und Utopie*, an influential contribution to the so called sociology of knowledge, may seem to be itself a plea for cognitive values. It is after all concerned to unmask the sources of

irrational beliefs, ideologies and utopias, that is to say, fictions. But Curtius takes it to be a version of “sociologism”, the view that sociology is the universal science, a view Mannheim presents, Curtius thinks, with an almost religious fervour. Mannheim’s sociologism does deal with the function of mind in the contemporary world but offers not knowledge merely a personal confession. The fictions Mannheim and his followers claim to have seen through include all evaluations. But Mannheim’s nihilism, Curtius suggests, is itself merely a personal inclination which relies on the rhetoric in favour of “dynamic” rather than “static” thought popularised by philosophies of life. Curtius’ Mannheim is blind to all value except that of authenticity or sincerity. The root of his errors is his conviction that thinking can never be an end in itself. Mannheim is part of the confused and irresponsible irrationalism of contemporary Germany<sup>6</sup>.

Nicolai Hartmann’s 1933 *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* explores the variety of sham beliefs and sentiments and the self-deception they involve – in mass-suggestion, majority opinions, public opinion, political life, journalism, art, taste, life-styles and conventional morality. He describes a number of mechanisms essential to such phenomena and asks what, if anything, can counteract the spread of the sham. Thus the force of suggestion, he argues, leads individuals to draw no consequences from their knowledge that they have been misled, it does not really convince but drowns out convictions and knowledge. Hartmann notes that Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, in his descriptions of “Das Man”, had isolated some aspects of these phenomena. But when Hartmann goes on to ask how sham and inauthenticity can be avoided the answer he gives is very unHeideggerian. Heidegger’s appeal to *Angst*, conscience and guilt cannot, he argues, tell us what it is in shared forms of life which works against sham and inauthenticity. Knowledge of all types and the pursuit of knowledge, in particular science, are the only spheres which are essentially free of sham, because of their essentially critical dimension and cumulative character. Science, he claims, differs from morality, ethos, art and legal traditions in two crucial and related respects. Sci-

ence is cumulative and progressive and there is no such thing as sham knowledge. Science is free of sham knowledge *because* it is cumulative. What we call “knowledge” is always a mixture of knowledge and error. But error in science is not any sort of inauthentic taking to be true, the phenomenon induced by suggestion, for example in public opinion. It is no deviation from the idea of truth. Epistemic enterprises of all sorts provide a critical instance and an ideal against which all other aspects of the common mind can be measured. But, as Hartmann notes, his view is incompatible with the pragmatist conception of theoretical interest and the theoretical attitude<sup>7</sup>.

In 1929 Husserl announces that “the European sciences have lost the great belief in themselves, in their absolute significance”, the “belief of the Enlightenment”, the “great belief, once the substitute for religious belief, that science leads to wisdom”<sup>8</sup>. In lectures given in Prague (1934) and Vienna (1935) and in his 1936 publication of part of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* Husserl pleads at length for a “heroism of reason”, a heroism which turns out to be possible only for those prepared to swallow Husserl’s transcendental idealism.

In 1934 another Austrian philosopher, Heinrich Gomperz, examines in a much more modest and rewarding fashion the possible relations between cognitive values, in particular the end or value of scientific knowledge, and practical values and the exigencies of action, in a pioneering study, “Die Wissenschaft und die Tat”<sup>9</sup>.

The philosophical enemies of Husserl and Hartmann, the logical positivists and the logical empiricists, with whom Musil feels a definite sympathy, are also fascinated by cognitive values. Throughout the decade, Bertrand Russell and the only French member of the Vienna Circle, Louis Rougier, return again and again to a variety of cognitive vices. Rougier published five critiques of different kinds of *mystique* – revolutionary, democratic, Soviet, political and economic. What is a “mystique”? Rougier says:

Du XIXe au XXe siècle, on parle couramment de la mystique du progrès, de la mystique démocratique, de la nouvelle mystique américaine de l'efficacité, de la mystique soviétique. *Le terme désigne alors un ensemble de croyances*, qu'on ne saurait ni démontrer en raison, ni fonder en expérience, mais *que l'on accepte aveuglement pour des motifs irrationnels*: par l'effet de la coutume dont parle Pascal, de l'éducation de l'autorité, de l'exemple, des préjugés prétendus nécessaires, bref de toute la pression du conformisme social. Ces croyances peuvent être morales, esthétiques, scientifiques, sociales, politiques. Toute doctrine telle que l'on n'éprouve plus la curiosité ou le besoin de la remettre en question, soit que l'on l'admette comme un dogme si évident que toute enquête sur son bien-fondé est superflue, soit qu'on y adhère par un acte de foi jugé si nécessaire par suite de sa bienfaisance sacro-sainte que l'abandonner serait scandaleux, est une mystique ou acceptée en tant que telle<sup>10</sup>.

Many mystiques are value-judgements. Rougier, like other logical positivists and empiricists, is an anti-realist about values and an anti-cognitivist about value-judgements. But although some value-judgements “express a simple preference without giving any reason” others involve a claim about the means appropriate to the realisation of preferences. Such claims have a truth-value. Rougier’s analyses of different mystiques study the relations between preferences and the claims about suitable means bound up with these. This strategy is now a very familiar one<sup>11</sup>.

Russell, along with Guglielmo Ferrero, Ortega y Gasset and Aldous Huxley, Rougier asserts, is one of “the sages of the West”, who have kept their heads amidst the “universal folly” of collectivisation and a stupefying conformism<sup>12</sup>. Russell’s 1935 article, “The Revolt against Reason”, the title of which is perhaps an allusion to Ortega’s book, contains aspects of a credo which is best summed up in Russell’s liberal decalogue, a text published in 1951, which repeats claims Russell made throughout his long career, before, during and after our decade. Every one of Russell’s commandments concerns cognitive values or norms:

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worth while to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavor to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful, even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness<sup>13</sup>.

*§2 Benda 1927 & Ortega 1930*

Spengler's "creed of spiritual barbarism", says the Hungarian realist phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai, is one of the creeds which "has roused great men of the West such as José Ortega y Gasset and Julien Benda to their eloquent and immortal philippics"<sup>14</sup>.

Benda's philippic refers to the values of justice and beauty, reason and truth<sup>15</sup> as the values of the clerisy, values towards which the attitude of the genuine "clerk" is not at all practical, but contemplative, although he does and should preach these values, since all practical goals tend to "bend the truth"<sup>16</sup>. In particular, any value the passion for truth, reason or justice may have is not itself a clerical value<sup>17</sup>. Benda also refers to the moral value of thought. Most of us, he asserts, do not think, if by thinking is meant "a personal effort to penetrate further into reality or to

explore the root of an *a priori* concept"; the "masses", the "people", the "vulgar" do not think<sup>18</sup>. But thinking only becomes the object of systematic hostility and contempt towards the end of the nineteenth century<sup>19</sup>. "Intellectual probity", which Benda opposes to such contempt, is "the will to respect the truth, whatever it is, and the refusal to bend it in one's interest or in that of some group"<sup>20</sup>.

The traditional attachment of the clerisy to the values mentioned is contrasted with the political passions of race, class, party and nation. The betrayal of the clerisy is its substitution of political passions for this attachment, in particular for the development of the networks of doctrines which increasingly subtend the different political passions<sup>21</sup>. The betrayal of the values of truth, reason and thought is a complex phenomenon which includes the rejection of conceptual thought in favour of intuition<sup>22</sup>, a rejection which is also a bugbear of Musil's; the promotion of the value of intuition over the value of clear and distinct ideas; the dismissal of non-contingent truths in favour of contingent truths; and contempt for independent thought<sup>23</sup>. Nietzsche and then Sorel, Barrès and Péguy want "to humiliate the values of knowledge as against the values of action"<sup>24</sup>. The modern "clerk", the traitorous "clerk", feels only contempt "for the beautiful Greek conception according to which science begins in the need to play, the perfect type of disinterested activity"<sup>25</sup>; "sensitivity to truth in itself outside every practical end, is a quite contemptible form of mind" and is replaced by the "glorification of prejudices"<sup>26</sup>. "Intellectual activity" is said to be "worthy of esteem to the extent that it is practical and only to this extent"<sup>27</sup>. The "littérateurs" who are his contemporaries (Musil refers to "Literaten" in very similar terms) "make fun of reasoning", agree that "the question of truth and falsity is a matter of complete indifference". In spite of their undoubted brilliance they employ in a completely arbitrary fashion expressions such as "therefore", as do German philosophers of life<sup>28</sup>. One bergsonian passion is the "hatred of science – more generally of the intelligence it signifies – the profound desire to humiliate its functions, to lower them

to the lowest degrees in the scale of values”<sup>29</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Benda calls his *Trahison* “a book of combat”<sup>30</sup>. Musil, too, speaks in the same terms of his work.

Benda does not take seriously the possibility that there might be, in addition to “universal” values, individual or personal values<sup>31</sup>. At one point, he notes the possibility that there are values which are relative to matters of fact rather than absolute<sup>32</sup> but normally assumes that one has to choose between universal values and individual or “relative” values, thus accepting an assumption made by his enemies, such as Barrès. Benda condemns particularisms of all kinds, in particular the substitutions of a personal morality for universal morality<sup>33</sup>. He quotes one of the earliest formulations of post-Kantian normative particularism, due to Schleiermacher<sup>34</sup>. The view that there are both universal and individual values (for example, justice and the value for a lover of his beloved) was defended, perhaps for the first time, by the philosopher Max Scheler; the “right relation between value-universalism and value-individualism”, he claims, is that the recognition and realisation of universal values is a minimum which must be satisfied before the recognition and realisation of individual values<sup>35</sup>. The point is not really very different from that made, in deontic terms, by Malebranche, in a passage Benda quotes: “One must always dispense justice before exercising charity”<sup>36</sup>.

Is a distinction between universal and individual values important for the philosophy of cognitive values? Consider the value of knowledge. Knowledge is sometimes of great extrinsic value (knowledge of the means necessary to realise one’s projects) and sometimes of great extrinsic disvalue (unpleasant, painful, frightening, unacceptable knowledge). Is it ever intrinsically valuable? One may think that certain types of knowledge are intrinsically valuable *for* a particular person or at least better for that person than illusion or ignorance – for example, knowledge about one’s life, vocation, about what is intrinsically valuable for oneself. (Perhaps a person’s knowledge about what is intrinsically valuable for her is intrinsically valuable for her *because* its object is

intrinsically valuable for her). But this is not the sort of epistemic value Benda has in mind. Truth, Benda thinks, following a long tradition, is, absolutely speaking, a good thing. But there are reasons, not dreamt of by Nietzsche and his ilk, for thinking that this is wrong. Consider justice, which is a value, and truth. If it is just that  $p$ , then it is good that  $p$  and it is good that it is just that  $p$ . But if it is true that  $p$ , it does not follow that it is good that it is true that  $p$ , nor that it is good that  $p$ . So truth is, strictly speaking, no value<sup>37</sup>. Of course, what is often intended by talk of the value of truth is the value of true beliefs or the claim that true beliefs are better than false beliefs. But beliefs are correct or incorrect, rather than true or false, and a belief that  $p$  is correct only if, and because (it is true that)  $p$ . Another thing often intended when one speaks of the value of truth is the importance of considering and finding out whether some claim is true. But then we are back with the value of knowledge and its acquisition<sup>38</sup>.

Ortega's once influential philippic combines social philosophy, cultural criticism and political philosophy. Its subject is what he calls mass-man. Unlike earlier social philosophies and theories of "the masses" and elites or influential minorities such as those of Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels and Leopold von Wieser, Ortega does not, when he is being careful, assign individuals to one of the two categories, the elite – the select minority – and the masses. Rather, he suggests, a mass-man is hidden in each of his European contemporaries. An even more important difference between Ortega and his predecessors is that the nature of mass-man is elucidated, in particular in chapter 8 of his *Revolt*, in terms of an individual's relation to cognitive values or norms:

The "ideas" of the average man are not genuine ideas, nor is their possession culture. An idea is a putting truth in checkmate. Whoever wishes to have ideas must first prepare himself to desire truth and to accept the rules of the game imposed by it. It is no use speaking of ideas when there is no acceptance of a higher authority to regulate them, a series of standards [*normas*] to which it is possible to appeal in a discussion ... There is no culture

where there is no respect [esteem, reverence, *acatamiento*] for certain final intellectual positions to which a dispute may be referred ... Properly speaking, there are no barbarian standards. Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made. The varying degrees of culture are measured by the greater or less precision of the standards<sup>39</sup>.

“Intellectual indocility”, the “closing up” or “obliteration” of the average soul, “intellectual hermeticism” (narrow-mindedness, *Borniertheit*) is just what the revolt of the masses consists in:

The individual finds himself already with a stock of ideas. He decides to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete. As he feels the lack of nothing outside himself, he settles down definitely amid his mental furniture. Such is the mechanism of self-obliteration<sup>40</sup>.

Under the species of Syndicalism and Fascism there appears for the first time in Europe a type of man *who does not want to give reasons or to be right*, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions. This is the new thing: the right not to be reasonable, the “reason of unreason”. Here I see the most palpable manifestation of the new mentality of the masses, ...<sup>41</sup>

The average man

... wishes to have opinions, but is unwilling to accept the conditions and presuppositions that underlie all opinion. Hence his ideas are in effect nothing more than appetites in words, something like musical romanzas ... To have an idea means believing one is in possession of the reasons for having it, and consequently means believing that there is such a thing as reason, a world of intelligible truths. To have ideas, to form opinions, is identical with appealing to such an authority, submitting oneself to it, accepting its code and its decisions, and therefore believing that the highest form of intercommunion is the dialogue in which the reasons for our ideas are discussed. But the mass-man would feel himself lost if he accepted discussion, and instinctively repudiates the obligation of accepting that supreme authority lying outside himself. Hence the “new thing” in Europe is “to have done with discussions” and detestation is expressed for all forms of intercommunion which imply acceptance of [respect for, *acatamiento*] objective standards, ranging from conversation to Parliament, and taking in science<sup>42</sup>.

Ortega does not spare his compatriots:

The paucity of Spanish intellectual culture is shown, not in greater or less knowledge, but in the habitual lack of caution and care to adjust one's self to truth which is usually displayed by those who speak and write. It is not the fact of judging rightly or wrongly – the truth is not within our reach – but the lack of scruple which makes them omit the elementary requirements for right judgment. We are like the country priest who triumphantly refutes the Manichean without having troubled to inquire what the Manichean believes<sup>43</sup>.

The anatomies of foolishness between 1927 and 1937 briefly considered here share many preoccupations and obsessions. Thus nationalism and its associated cognitive vices play a central role in the writings of Curtius, Musil and Benda. And Curtius and Benda see in humanism, about which they are most eloquent, an alternative to what they most deplore<sup>44</sup>.

The main immediate predecessor of our anatomies is the obsession with clarity and exactness in the thought and art of Austria-Hungary which begins at the end of the nineteenth century. Klimt's *Nuda Veritas*, Otto Weininger's near identification of "logical" and ethical values, Rilke's scorn for the *à peu-près*, Karl Kraus' "ethics of language" (Brecht), his identification of ethical vice in errors of punctuation, and the striving for clarity of Husserl and Wittgenstein are some tips of this particular Austrian iceberg. Another is Brentano's successful propaganda in Vienna for his vision of the history of philosophy as a series of efforts driven by a disinterested theoretical interest which regularly gives way to philosophical decadence when the primacy of practical interests asserts itself and then collapses into mysticism or obscurantism. Some of our anatomists belong to this Austrian tradition – Husserl, Gomperz and Musil, the most exact writer of literature ever (Broch). One non-Austrian predecessor of our anatomies is Scheler's identification of a misological tendency in German thought he called "Pan-Romanticism" (the already mentioned trio, Klages, Spengler and Lessing), a tradition which is also the object of Musil's irony.<sup>45</sup>

The decade from 1927 to 1937 was also followed by many accounts and criticisms of cognitive vices, in particular in totalitarian thought and in totalitarianism. One early contribution to the genre is the very thorough anatomy of the intellectual foundations of Nazism, *The War against the West*, published in 1938 by the already mentioned Aurel Kolnai. *La pensée captive* (1953), by the Polish poet and thinker Czesław Miłosz, is a remarkably subtle account of the variety of cognitive vice in totalitarian thought and society<sup>46</sup>. Their books are unfortunately not as well-known as the important analyses of Koestler, Talmon, Arendt and Aron<sup>47</sup>.

### §3 Foolishness?

Our anatomists see everywhere an indifference or hostility to truth, knowledge, reason, justification and argument and deplore this. Sometimes they use the language of cognitive values or norms. Sometimes their views of values and norms are those of the naive realist (Husserl, Benda, Curtius) sometimes anything but (Pareto, Russell, Rougier)<sup>48</sup>. Their pleas are a mirror-image of the philosophies of Nietzsche, Bergson and pragmatism and in particular of versions of the idea that vital values are more important than cognitive values. I have called blindness, indifference or hostility to cognitive values foolishness<sup>49</sup>. This way of understanding foolishness differs from many traditional accounts of foolishness, as we shall see. Of all our anatomists, Ortega is the only one who uses the term foolishness (*tontería*) in a similar way, as far as I can tell. Foolishness, so understood, is not stupidity. Foolishness, unlike stupidity, is a trait or vice or habit for which one is responsible<sup>50</sup>.

Benda and Musil make related distinctions. The lowering of the intellectual tenor or attitude of a life (*tenue intellectuelle*), Benda says, is not be confused with a lowering of intelligence<sup>51</sup>. And Musil distinguishes between two types of “Dummheit”. The first is based on weakness of understanding and is, above all, slow. Of the second type, the “higher, pretentious form of stupidity”, Musil says that it “is not so much lack of

intelligence as *failure* of intelligence". It is a disease of culture and of the mind<sup>52</sup>. Benda locates the fundamental cause of the betrayal of the clerisy in its thirst for sensations, just the cause Socrates located behind the philosophies of the sophists, the patrons of the treacherous clerisy<sup>53</sup>. Musil describes the higher form of *Dummheit* as the adaptation of the mind (*Geist*) to life, an adaptation which, he thinks, threatens life itself. Musil's diagnosis refers to the preference for vital values over cognitive values, Benda's to the preference for sensory or hedonic values. But Benda also often gives a diagnosis like Musil's.

The identification of foolishness with blindness, indifference or hostility to cognitive values involves something of a departure from traditional conceptions of foolishness. These employ what might be called a *thick* conception of foolishness and wisdom. The thick conception contains two central claims. First, foolishness is not only opposed to wisdom, it is the absence of wisdom. Second, to be wise is not only to be cognitively virtuous, it is to know certain things, often to possess knowledge, theoretical or practical, of what is most important, of the highest or last things, of first principles etc. The thick conception combines naturally with the curious idea that only philosophers can be wise and thus that the mere non-philosopher avoids foolishness only to the extent that he approximates to the status of a proto-philosopher. This bizarre idea, so flattering to the philosopher, was perhaps last taken seriously by Husserl.

The thick conception may be distinguished from a *thin* conception. On this view, of the two, wisdom and foolishness, it is foolishness which wears the trousers. To be wise is to be the sort of person who is capable of foolishness and avoids being foolish. (As Ortega nicely puts it: "the man of sense [*el perspicaz*] ... is constantly catching himself within an inch of being a fool; hence he makes an effort to escape from the imminent folly"; he "sees all the time at his feet the open and unfathomable abyss of foolishness [*estulticia*]"<sup>54</sup>). And foolishness is, as suggested, indifference, hostility or blindness to cognitive values. To the extent

that wisdom can be characterised positively it is in terms of a due appreciation and knowledge of cognitive values and their exemplification. Knowledge and justification are important not only in theoretical and practical matters. For reason is not only theoretical or practical. Our preferences, attachments and affective attitudes, just as much as our beliefs and our actions, may be informed by alethophobia, cognophobia, misology or blindness to cognitive values, and may be correct (right) or incorrect (wrong)<sup>55</sup>.

The affective attitudes towards cognitive values which are at the heart of Benda's betrayal of the clerisy and Ortega's mass-man are still with us. This is not, it is true, a philosophical claim. But it is a relatively uncontroversial claim. Indeed Benda noted that the betrayal of the clerisy in the 50 years preceding 1927 was no mere fashion which would be followed by a contrary movement<sup>56</sup>. Postmodernism's suspicion of the values of truth and knowledge is the direct descendant of the traditions of thought analysed by Benda and Musil. One immediate consequence of the thin characterisation of foolishness proposed here is that Postmodernism is foolish and that postmodernists, if sincere, are to that extent, foolish. This is a pleasing consequence. But of course being pleased by the consequences of one's views is to hover over the abyss of foolishness, or worse.

The curious neglect of the anatomies of foolishness considered here, and of the tendency they represent, is all the more surprising for those of us who think that the prose of Benda, Musil and Ortega, belongs to the great prose of the French, German and Spanish languages. A greatness due in part to the striving for clarity inseparable from and palpable in their prose.

## NOTES

1. On Musil on cognitive values, cf Mulligan 2014.
2. Ortega 1961, p. 53; the last sentence quoted is not to be found in the original (Ortega 2000, p. 123).
3. Curtius 1927, p. 859, 858. On Curtius, cf. Hoeges 1994.
4. Curtius 1932, pp. 20–21.
5. Curtius 1932, pp. 43–44.
6. Curtius 1932, pp. 88–102.
7. Hartmann 1962, chs 40–41, 368–386. Hartmann, most unusually for a twentieth century German philosopher uninfluenced by analytic philosophy, is a realist who writes clearly and gives arguments for and against his views and rejects all varieties of idealism. His *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* is an investigation of what today would be called the ontology of social and cultural facts. It contains some of Hartmann's contributions to his *Anti-Heidegger*. Thus Hartmann's realism leads him to condemn Heidegger's failure to distinguish properly between objective time (the B-series, before-after) and temporal consciousness (the A-series, present-past-future) (Hartmann 1962, p. 150).
8. Husserl 1974, p. 9.
9. Gomperz 1934, cf. Gomperz 1938, and for a careful evaluation of Gomperz's views, cf. Rutte 1994.
10. Rougier 1935, p. 11, emphases mine – KM. The term “mystique” is employed by Rougier's teacher, Edmond Goblot, in *La Barrière et le niveau. Etude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne* – la “mystique des jugements de valeur” (Goblot 1925, p. 25). Like Rougier, Goblot is a logician who writes about sociology – in this case about what was to become known in French sociology as “la distinction”.
11. Rougier 1935, pp. 22–23. The same strategy is employed by Goblot. On Rougier, cf. Marion 2007, in particular p. 212.
12. Rougier 1938, p. 3.
13. Russell 1969, pp. 71–72. Marion 2009 sets out Russell's attachment to cognitive values and anti-realism about values.
14. Kolnai 1938, p. 215.
15. Benda 1975, p. 97. Engel 2012 is a wonderfully penetrating and thorough account of all aspects of Benda's thought, enlivened by a deep sympathy with Benda and frequent excursions which deal very effectively with the contemporary successors of Benda's enemies.
16. Benda 1975, pp. 98–99, 102.
17. Benda 1975, p. 104.
18. Benda 1948, p. 243–245.

19. Benda 1948, p. 269–270.
20. Benda 1948, p. 275.
21. Benda 1975, p. 121.
22. Benda 1975, p. 165.
23. Benda 1975, pp. 196, 166, 180.
24. Benda 1975, p. 196.
25. The internal connexion between *homo ludens*, *homo sapiens* and the disinterested desire to know plays a central role in Gomperz's 1904 account of the ideal of inner freedom in ancient philosophy, in Husserl's objections to Heidegger's account of theoretical attitudes as a "deficient mode", and in the anthropologies of Scheler and Ortega.
26. Benda 1975, p. 199.
27. Benda 1975, p. 197. Benda's criticisms of this pragmatism resemble in many respects the earlier criticisms given by Scheler minus the latter's intuitionism.
28. On "donec" cf. Benda 1937, pp. 70–71; on "also" cf. Benda 1947, p. 69.
29. Benda 1915, p. 139. On Benda's wide-ranging critique of Bergson, cf. Engel's luminous chapter, "L'Anti-Bergson" (Engel 2012, pp. 77–138).
30. Benda 1937, p. 99.
31. Cf. Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011.
32. Benda 1975, p. 91.
33. Benda 1975, pp. 163–165.
34. Benda 1975, p. 167.
35. Scheler 1966, p. 484.
36. Malebranche, *Morale*, II, 7; Benda 1975, p. 59.
37. The thesis, but not the argument, is given by Scheler (1966, pp. 125, 197–198).
38. The view that some kinds of knowledge are intrinsically valuable for a person is to be found in Scheler's later writings. Something like this view is dismissed in favour of the absolute conception by Hartmann (Hartmann 1962, pp. 383–384).
39. Ortega 1961, pp. 54–55 (Ortega 2000, p. 97). One account of elites and masses which may be thought to anticipate that given by Ortega is Pareto's sociology of elites, derivations and "residues". But Pareto is far more interested in describing the variety of human stupidity than our relations to cognitive values. Indeed he thinks that value terms cannot be employed in rigorous reasoning. And, as Aron points out, according to Pareto, but not Ortega: "The elite is composed of those who have succeeded in their activities – the prostitutes as well as the recipients of the Nobel Prize" (Aron 1988, p. 368). On Benda as a precursor of Pareto and on Benda's *Anti-Bergson* as an application of what Pareto calls the theory of derivations, cf. Bousquet 1960, p. 162.
40. Ortega 1961 (Ortega 2000, p. 94).
41. Ortega 1961, pp. 55–56 (Ortega 2000, p. 98).

42. Ortega 1961, p. 56 (Ortega 2000, pp. 98–99).
43. Ortega 1961, p. 55 (Ortega 2000, p. 98). Does the prominence of cognitive values or norms in Ortega's *Revolt* owe anything to Benda's earlier work? Ortega says that his book develops ideas published earlier in *España Invertebrada* (1922). This is indeed the case. But the distinction between masses and minorities drawn by Ortega in 1922 is not set out in terms of attitudes towards cognitive values or norms, although one form of irrationality, *ressentiment*, does play an important role in the book (Ortega 1998, pp. 47, 56, 108, 81, 112). It is a book concerned more with aristophobia (Ortega 1998, p. 92) than with alethophobia. But in "Reforma de la inteligencia" (1926, 1925) Ortega anticipates some of Benda's most striking claims: Intellectual inquiry is primarily a useless luxury, a sport, and only secondarily useful; the introduction of practical norms into thinking "paralyses and blinds" it (Ortega 2008, p. 119). Intellectuals began to try to run the world around 1800 and their imperialism has been a complete failure. The more intellectuals behave as apostles the more the quality of their thought suffers. They must therefore retreat from society, from the public to the private sphere. Intellectual minorities must eliminate from their work all political and humanitarian pathos. They must cease to be taken seriously. But this retreat must not be sudden because of the omnipresence of intellectuals in society (Ortega 2008, pp. 121–123). In a 1933 addition to his text, Ortega says that intelligence requires solitude for "the attention of others seduces us into thinking *for them*" and makes intelligence servile. Ortega's invitation to intellectuals to retreat from the public sphere in order to avoid epistemic vice had been formulated even earlier. In 1924 he writes: "The intelligentsia [*la inteligencia*] ought not to aim to command, not even to influence and save man" (Ortega 2008a, p. 112). As Pascal Engel has pointed out to me, Benda sketches some of the ideas he was to develop in *La Trahison* already in 1925 (cf. Lefèvre 1925, pp. 33–36).
44. Curtius 1962 (1921) is a detailed study of Barrès and French nationalism. Philistinism combined with *ressentiment* is, according to Curtius, the most powerful enemy of humanism (Curtius 1932, pp. 127–128).
45. Cf. Mulligan 2014. Scheler (1971) is also the author of one of the few systematic modern attempts to understand the relations between ethical and cognitive values. He is also an important influence on Hartmann, Curtius and Ortega.
46. Cf. Mulligan 2013.
47. Both Kolnai and Miłosz were influenced by Scheler.
48. In his 1923 sketch of a naive realist philosophy of value, Ortega identifies the values of knowledge and exactness as two "spiritual, intellectual values" (Ortega 2004, p. 38). But as his philosophy becomes increasingly vitalist he modifies his early account of the value of knowledge (Ortega 1966, pp. 161, 168–70).
49. Mulligan 2009.

50. On at least one occasion Ortega uses “tonto” to mean *stupid*, the opposite of *intelligent* or *clever* (Ortega 1961, p. 53; Ortega 2000, p. 95).
51. Benda 1975, p. 212, cf. 97. Benda also quotes and endorses Malebranche’s “delightful remark”: “Le stupide et le bel esprit sont également fermés à la vérité; il y a toutefois cette différence que le stupide esprit la respecte, tandis que le bel esprit la méprise.” (Benda 1975, p. 209). On this remark, cf. Engel’s no less delightful pages (2012, pp. 248–250).
52. Musil 1983, pp. 1286–1287.
53. Benda 1975, p. 90, cf. 211. In their program for the Vienna Circle, Neurath et al. note a kinship between their view and the views of the sophists rather than the platonists, and proclaim that “the scientific world-view serves life” (Neurath et al., 1979 (1929) pp. 87, 100).
54. Ortega 1961, p. 53 (Ortega 2000, p. 95); Ortega 1998, p. 142.
55. Cf. Mulligan 2009. The thin conception of foolishness differs from traditional, thick conceptions in one other respect: “foolishness”, like such cognate terms as “Torheit” and “sottise” often connotes the opposite of practical wisdom (*Klugheit*). Cf. Bollnow 1958, pp. 99–114.
56. Benda 1975, p. 202.

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