

CHAPTER 8

The Final Years

MANY OF THE young people who had gathered around Mitrinović during the 1930s were drafted into military service at the outbreak of the Second World War. Depressed by world events, he was particularly troubled by developments in his own country of Yugoslavia, and deeply affected by the loss of several of the young men who had been close to him. John Harker was killed when the ship which was taking him to his army posting was torpedoed. Orion Playfair lost his life in a plane crash, whilst Christopher Mayne died early in 1939. He was left with the company of the older women who had been associated with him since the 1920s, particularly Valerie Cooper and Winifred Gordon Fraser.

In the inter-war years Mitrinović had been in the habit of occasionally retiring to places like Ditchling and Worthing for periods of rest and recuperation. As an alien he was no longer allowed to visit these restricted areas during the war, so most of his time was spent in and around his old haunts of Bloomsbury. He had lodgings at 38 Bloomsbury Street whilst the group maintained a house at 2 Gower Street as a meeting place throughout the war. It was during this period that Mitrinović had to resort to selling paintings he had collected over the years in order to raise funds. Despite problems with his health, the limitations on his movements as an alien, and the dangers from the bombing raids on London – apparently his Italian landlord had such faith in him that he believed that ‘so long as Mr. Mitrinović is in the house, we will not be bombed’ – Mitrinović continued to read and to meet with those of his group who were in London. Indeed, for a while during 1940-1941 he

delivered a weekly Sunday morning lecture at 115 Gower Street on various aspects of psychology and philosophy.

He was particularly affected by the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When the news of the bombing was received, he and a small group of friends who were with him went out for a meal in a Japanese restaurant near St Giles Church in Soho – a small symbolic gesture in the direction of human solidarity and fellowship.¹

After the war the remaining members of the pre-war group gathered together. Depleted in numbers with their leader in poor health, they decided that it was pointless to embark on any new political or economic initiative. It was felt, however, that action on the cultural front would be possible and worthwhile. It was decided to form a lecture society, the Renaissance Club, which first met towards the end of 1945 and continued in existence until the summer of 1965. Occasionally referred to as the Anti-Barbarus Renaissance Club of the New Atlantis, it was described by one of its founders in a letter to a friend:

The purpose of the Renaissance Club is, as its title implies, to make more widespread the realisation that in the present crisis of human life nothing less than Rebirth is adequate. We are faced with such an unprecedented situation – science having brought to us the choice between almost unbounded wealth and leisure, if we had the courage to accept it, or racial suicide if we cannot change the whole basis of our life. And also having before us the fact that our human world could now be one world which could be planned economically and politically so as to make life worth living for the individual person, but that so far our world leaders do not care at all for the individual, but for the nation, class, party, or sect which they happen to represent.

What is lacking is not technique or cleverness in any form whatever, but human wisdom and the knowledge of human motives and of meaning and art of life ...

It is to appreciate the knowledge and wisdom of the past and present in one whole picture, and to combat the present democratic barbarism which denies all human values and puts in their place the values of money, sensationalism and mere quantity, size and speed, that the Anti-Barbarus Renaissance Club exists.²

During the twenty years of the Club's existence, over 200 lectures were delivered under its auspices by various speakers covering a vast range of topics and subjects. Some speakers were included

as old associates of Mitrinović, like C. B. Purdom, David Davies, Dr. Morris Robb, and Dr. Belden. Amongst the others were Dr. Arnold Groeneveld, the Dutch psychiatrist who had done valuable work during the war in helping Jews escape Nazi persecution; Dr. J. H. Fleure, the geographer who had worked with Sir Patrick Geddes; Dr. E. V. Rieu, the translator of the Gospels and of Homer; Dr. Ifor Evans (later Lord Evans) who became Provost of University College, London; the Egyptologist Dr. Margaret Murray; Frederick Soddy; Canon Raven, Master of Christ's College and later Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University; the art historian Dr. Sudhin Ghose; Archbishop Anthony Bloom of the Russian Orthodox Church; the author Naomi Mitchison; Dr. Karl König, the founder of the Camphill movement for the treatment of handicapped children; and Martin Buber, who had been connected with the *Blut-bund*.

Mitrinović played no active public part in the Renaissance Club initiative, mainly for reasons of health. However, some of his associates made attempts to arouse public interest in the kind of creative thinking that had informed the New Britain movement. Thus, in the summer of 1948 a symposium was held at the Swedenborg Hall in London under the title of 'British Renaissance and National Senate'. Organised by members of the New Europe Group under the name of British Renaissance Initiative, the aim of the symposium was to discuss the contemporary relevance of such themes as monetary reform, workers' control in industry, devolution and federation. Later that summer, on August 6th, the Swedenborg Hall was the venue for another British Renaissance Initiative – a meeting commemorating the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which was addressed by Professor Soddy. In his opening remarks the chairman, Charles Purdom, observed that: 'Hiroshima was one of the most shameful acts in history. The use of the atomic bomb is an act of materialism; a denial of spiritual values and a denial of human brotherhood.' Also in 1948 a New Europe Group delegation led by Professor Soddy attended the Congress of the European Union of Federalists at Rome. The last public event to take place under the name of the New Europe Group was also the last public appearance of Mitrinović – on February 17th 1950 when he delivered a statement at a lunch-time press conference under the rather abstruse title of 'Proposals towards a world system of foreign policies, severely impartial proposals and integrally inclusive.'

Throughout the war years and immediately afterwards Mitrinović had continued working on his ideas for settling world problems. His guiding principle was to look at these problems constructively and imaginatively as a whole rather than merely as a collection of unrelated problems. He maintained that the only lasting way to win a war was for the victor to take over the chief virtue of the vanquished. This implied that Britain, the arch-exponent of pragmatism and 'muddling through' should start to plan and act from rationally thought-out principles. As for Germany, it should cease to be a centralised state. He proposed that its capital, Berlin, should be figuratively turned into a lake, whilst Germany should be transformed into a federation consisting of the different elements that had once been states themselves. To ensure that Germany remained a federation it should be occupied not by the great powers, who would only fight over her, but by the small neighbouring countries who had been ravaged and occupied by her. He further proposed that the great powers – the USSR, Britain, France and the USA – should pay for the occupation. He proposed that the two greatest powers, the USA and the USSR, should become 'World Wings' or protecting powers in conjunction with one another, each having a major sphere of influence. Europe should become three federations which he called 'Europa-Noricum', consisting of Britain, Scandinavia and the Benelux countries, and which would look towards the USA; 'Europa Latina', consisting of France, Italy, Spain and Portugal which would be oriented towards the two federations of Africa and South America; and 'Europa-Scythia,' including the Balkan peninsula and extending to the Baltic, which would be protected by the USSR. He envisaged many different links between various aspects of these powers, and federations so as to weave the whole planet into an organically diversified unity.

One of his more interesting ideas in this respect was the possibility that the world of nation states should be superseded by three different kinds of federations, each with different borders. These would be respectively economic, cultural and political. According to Mitrinović many of the problems of central Europe concerned regions which administratively belonged to one country, but which economically fitted better with another and were culturally and linguistically related to a third. In many such cases throughout the world the different regions could be administratively devolved and be more closely related to different neighbours in different respects.

The statement which Mitrinović gave to the press at Simpson's Restaurant in the Strand was the only public account he gave of his suggestions for a World Organic Order. It followed the lines of his previous thinking and culminated in a proposal for two world initiatives: 'a triune Eastern Alliance of the Pacific' consisting of Japan, China and India, and 'a triune Western Alliance of the Atlantic' consisting of America, Russia and Europe. He also proposed that Britain and the British Commonwealth should give the initiative and act as the inter-mediator for this Western Alliance.

All these different proposals, completely out of synch with the 'realities' of the emerging post-war world system, were evidence of the manner in which Mitrinović continued to rework and reformulate the notions that he had developed and which he had tried to communicate to others by different means during his lifetime. These had been expressed and worked out in many different contexts, in different movements and among different sets of people. His prime means of communication had always been through personal dialogue. Consequently he had always expressed his thoughts in ways which suited the context in which he was speaking. During the post-war period he attempted to bring these different threads and formulations together in a way which was intended to be more generally intelligible and accessible.

The most comprehensive and *relatively* straightforward summary and formulation of these different aspects of his thought was one which he called 'The Four Onlys.' They consisted of four major notions which he insisted were equally valid and necessary components of any approach to a proper understanding of the world and as a basis for acting upon the world. They were: 'Only the World-whole'; 'Only the individual'; 'Only the senate radius'; and 'Only the Triune Revelation'. These four 'onlys' expressed the sequential focus of his thought and activity during his lifetime. His whole world view can therefore be conveniently summarised by taking them one by one.

The World-Whole

This 'only' affirmed that only from the gestalt, the whole, can the various constituent elements and parts of the world be properly understood. One cannot understand the role of the various sub-units of humanity except by considering them in the context

of, and from the point of view of, the world as a whole and humanity as a single family. 'The problem of races, nations, trade unions etc. cannot be dealt with effectively so long as they are treated as separate problems about separate entities.' Rather, they should be considered 'as functions of the whole human organism. Only in relation to the whole can their function be understood.'³ This notion was first dealt with by Mitrinović in *The New Age*, when he put forward the notion of the world as a developing organism, and considered the idea of a functional world order as the only one which would make possible the solution of international problems, without recourse to violence.

The Individual

Only individuals are ultimate ends in themselves. Only individual human beings can comprehend the pattern of the world as a whole, and the conscious organisation of humanity as an organic whole can be brought about only on the basis of the free will of individuals. Moreover, the pattern for the organic restructuring of the world in macrocosm lies within the microcosm of the individual organism:

The whole is the concern of each and every individual. Individuals only can comprehend the whole, because the gestalt of the whole is contained in the individual. The content of every individual is the whole human race. Man has no canon by which to judge the whole except his own nature. The form which unites and relates the functioning organs of the whole world, and the form which unites and relates the functioning organs of the single man, are the same.⁴

Although Mitrinović in his early years had been working politically for the liberation of his country, and whilst in *The New Age* he had been writing about races and nations, he realised that his personal strength lay with influencing individuals, not states. Only through individuals could the world be changed. A new social and international order could be brought about and maintained only by individuals who had radically changed their ways of thinking and acting. Particularly during the period of the New Britain Movement he had used the phrase 'Self-change for world-change,' and it was probably in awareness of this need that he had earlier formed the British branch of the International Society for Individual Psychology after having met Alfred Adler. And in the second 'World Affairs' series which he wrote in the *New Britain*

Weekly he continually returned to the theme of the primacy of the individual.

The true wholeness is in personality only. In nations and inter-nations, classes, institutions, there is no centre. The God-centre and the worth and essence is of individuality only ... Therefore nations should not be adored, nor classes, nor sexes, nor ages of man. No collective, no mass and block should be lawgiver and worthy of worship and true love. Individuals matter. Freedom matters greatly. It is freedom and self-accomplishment of human singles that matters.⁵

The Senate Radius

According to Mitrinović the principle which related the individual parts to each other and to the whole was that of function. Social order must be a conscious organic order in which all individuals and groupings of individuals are recognised as functioning parts of the whole. Therefore there must be radical devolution and many different kinds of federation. The balance between these functioning parts of the world organism must be maintained by free mutual agreement and accommodation. There was therefore, as in the human organism, need for an integrating function which might bring about and hold the balance between all the various functions in society and throughout the world. This was the function Mitrinović called Senate. He illustrated it by the symbolism of the circle. In this the circumference could be taken to represent the world, and the centre to represent the individual. The individual cannot directly identify himself or herself with the world as a whole, just as the centre and the circumference are at a distance from one another. They need the intermediation of a radius. There exist an indefinitely large number of radii, which can be taken to represent all the various possible groupings in the world: nations, races, professions, religions and so on – linking the individual to a larger group or collective. But such groupings and networks are all partial ones, each pursuing their own specific collective self-interest.

To continue with the analogy, if existing groupings and networks – radii – that link the individual to wider collectivities pursue partial and particular interests, then a different kind of radius is necessary which can link the disparate individuals to a common purpose and interest. This could be visualised as a spiral radius starting from the centre and going out spirally towards the circumference so that

it cuts through every other radius and finishes up on the circumference opposite the place where it started from the centre. This Mitrinović called the 'senate radius'. It symbolised the notion that senate would not be a special elite of persons above the ordinary groupings of life, but consist of those within each grouping who took upon themselves the function of relating their different groupings to one another and keeping the balance of the whole, performing the necessary intermediating function in all walks and levels of life between the individual and humanity as a whole.

The function of senate was to be one of reconciliation between conflicting groups and interests, but it was not one of trying to solve or avoid all conflicts. Mitrinović recognised that there are necessary conflicts of principle and values between the different functions of an organism. If these cease the organism dies. However, he maintained that many of the conflicts in the world were dysfunctional ones arising from an imbalance or wrong relationship between the different world elements. These cannot be dealt with in the context in which they arise, but need to be seen within the wider context of the whole organism. This approach Mitrinović called 'third force.' The first and second forces, those diametrically opposed to each other, each provoke one another as their opposites. Third force is that force or power for change which is guided by an understanding of the needs of the organism as a whole, and as such operated on a different level from the other two. The role of senators was to act in accordance with this third force. As members of the conflicting groups, senators would identify to a degree with the group position, but ideally they would be able to maintain an attitude of 'creative neutrality' or 'aggressive impartiality' because of their identification with the integrity of the 'whole', above and beyond the sectoral interests of the group.

The Three Revelations

Those who are going to try to hold the balance in society and in a world order must have some criterion by which to judge and on which to base their actions at any time. As indicated above, Mitrinović considered that the organism was the only model which could provide such a guide-line, and he maintained that three-foldness, the three-in-one, triunity has been the most basic portrayal of organic wholeness. To support his view, he pointed to the three

major systems in the human body – the metabolic, the nervous and the respiratory and circulatory systems; in psychology there are the three functions of will, thought and emotion; and in the nuclear family there is typically a mother, father and child. This threefoldness operates not only in simultaneity, as in the human body, but also in succession. The father, mother and child exist simultaneously as family, but the father and mother precede the child.

In the past most expressions of this basic triunity had dealt only with the three aspects either in simultaneity, like the Vedanta philosophy, or in succession, like the Hegelian dialectic. Mitrinović was looking for a way of stating triunity both in simultaneity and in succession which was modern, critical and historically verifiable. This he found in the notion of three major worldviews which he formulated as the Three Revelations. According to his understanding each of these world views had been predominant during successive periods of history. Each was still adhered to by sections of humanity around the globe. Each was distinct yet complementary and equally valid – each focusing on a necessary aspect of the whole human truth.

According to Mitrinović the First Revelation was that one found most commonly in the pre-Christian era. It was the view of the world as an organic unity within which humanity had its appointed place, as did all other things including the Gods themselves – the whole permeated by the Divine. It was the view of the world held before the power of conceptual thought had been developed, when humans saw themselves not as independent and separate individuals but as part of a natural and divine order. The First Revelation was thus, for Mitrinović, the revelation of the Divine in the world; a view which found its philosophical expression in the Vedanta and of which Rudolf Steiner was the most significant exponent in the twentieth century.

The Second Revelation was the Christian revelation of the Divine in humanity. Solovyov's interpretation of Christianity was considered by Mitrinović to be the key expression of this revelation. According to Solovyov Christianity affirmed that the spirit of the whole, God, was incarnated in one person, Jesus Christ. Christ as a historical figure was both human and God, and as such embodied the whole potentiality of humanity. This then was the revelation of the Divine in a single person, Jesus Christ; and the

duty of humanity was to follow the example and way of Christ for 'no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me'.

If the First Revelation was of the permeation of the Divine throughout the whole cosmic and natural order, and the Second Revelation was of the Divine in a single person, the Third Revelation was of the Divine within every person. According to the First Revelation there are deities, but no single God except for the Divine whole. The view of the Second Revelation was radically opposed to this conception. It asserted that there was a centre to the universe – God incarnated in Jesus Christ from whom all values were derived. The essence of the Third Revelation was that there are many centres, each being of ultimate value in itself. According to Mitrinović the outstanding prophet of this Third Revelation was Erich Gutkind who, as we have seen, asserted that the responsibility for the future of humanity lay with humanity itself and, in particular, those individuals who attained a new level of human consciousness beyond the limits of the narrow individual self. Mitrinović referred to such philosophers as Nietzsche, Otto Weininger and Max Stirner as major exponents of this Third Revelation, each of whom affirmed the sovereignty of the individual and the power of human beings to shape their own future without reliance on or reference to external or supra-mundane forces or deities.

Each of these revelations, Mitrinović affirmed, was equally valid as a way of approaching reality. It was possible to view phenomena from the perspective of the world as a whole, from the standpoint of the individual, and from a position which emphasised the inter-relatedness of individuals and phenomena. There was also a fourth point of view, that which accepted the validity of all three perspectives at the same time.

Hence, the third revelation could be considered as the synthesis of the first two. If the thesis of the first revelation was the world as a single whole, the antithesis embodied in the second was the significance of the individual person. Their synthesis was embodied in the third revelation, which pointed to the creation of a truly world community by free, self-conscious individuals – the creation of a 'community of singles'.

Those around Mitrinović during the post-war years struggled to grasp the significance of this notion of three revelations and its

centrality to the principle of senate. According to Mitrinović, since each 'revelation' or world-view represented a radically different approach to life and thought, and since each of these approaches was held by a very large proportion of the world's population, then an equal appreciation of all three revelations was necessary for anyone who sought to act as senate. Furthermore, they also served as an introduction to ways of thinking radically different from the formal logic which dominates most of our present-day intellectual thinking in the West. This mode of reflecting on and engaging with the phenomenal world around us denies contradiction, but in life we are faced with contradiction the whole time. In theory as in life there is always a synthesis possible between the thesis and the antithesis, and equally this synthesis is never final, but is always the thesis of a new sequence. The synthesis is never on the level of the original contradiction, but always in a broader context.

It was the capacity to embrace and understand the different world-views at the same time that Mitrinović considered to be the key to the intermediary function of senators. Such an appreciation required a new way of thinking, to which Mitrinović gave the name Anthro-philosophy. Humanity (anthropos) should become the centre and the starting point for all thought and knowledge. Truth no longer resided in a divinely-ordained reality, and neither did it rest in the 'eternal' truths of science. Writing in *The New Atlantis Quarterly* Mitrinović affirmed in his usual cryptic style: 'It is due to us that we should lose the Fear of God and that we should stop our glorification of matter. For we, humanity are the Measurers also ... We are not only measurable objects.'⁶ He believed that we had reached a stage in our human development when we must learn to share our subjective experience, and that from this sharing of our different truths we would gradually approach a common human truth. The criterion by which such truths should be judged was the degree to which they made human life richer and more meaningful.

It is clear from Mitrinović's treatment of the three revelations and other aspects of his thought that he viewed human history as passing through a number of developmental stages. He occasionally likened these to the different phases through which the individual human being passed in the course of life. Jung portrayed the first half of life as essentially extroverted and the latter half as

introverted. The imagery that comes to mind is of the life of the individual as a tapestry. During the first half of life the many threads of different colours are spun as the individual goes out into the world, embarking on new ventures and pursuing different projects. At a certain point in life, however, the decision needs to be made that the time of spinning new threads has drawn to a close, the time is ripe for the task of weaving the different threads into a coherent and meaningful pattern – the phase of introversion or focusing inwards.

This transformation from spinning new threads to weaving the existing ones into a consistent pattern is a fundamental turning point in the life of the individual. Mitrinović believed that humanity as a whole had reached such a turning point. According to him:

There will be no more great geniuses, no more great prophets, philosophers, artists. The primordial sources have been worked out to the full. There can be no more original notions in philosophy, no new revelations in religion, no fresh inspiration in art. This is not a sign of decadence, but the sign of a new aeon, a new level of existence. There is no longer need of new influxes from a few great original creative men: there is need of a creativity which is possible to the many.⁷

Just as the individual at such a turning point has to face the whole question of the meaning and purpose of their life, so humanity had now to face the equally critical question of the meaning of human life on the planet. Historically humanity had been very largely engaged in the struggle for survival, or in struggles with one another for possessions and power. But, by the 1950s, Mitrinović believed in the potential of technology to produce plenty for all. Moreover, our capacity to annihilate each other with weapons of mass destruction made it imperative that we should order our world as a whole. However, for material plenty to be realised and a world without war to be achieved, it was necessary for humanity as a whole to share a vision of the future significance of human life, and central to this must be the recognition of the interdependence of all.

The bulk of Mitrinović's insights and ideas about the past, present and future of humanity, as he developed and reworked them after the war, was recorded in note form by a small number of dedicated associates (particularly Winifred Gordon Fraser) who had linked their lives to his and who remained with him until his death in 1953 at the age of 66. Throughout his life in Britain he

had needed regular periods of convalescence at nursing homes in places such as Harrogate, Bath, Cheltenham and Worthing. He suffered a serious heart failure in 1936 from which he never fully recovered. Then, in the winter of 1947 when there was a failure in the gas and electricity supply in London, he took Jack Murphy and his wife to a *matinée* performance at the theatre. They had to walk back to his lodgings in Bloomsbury Street through the snow. He contracted double pneumonia, which aggravated his heart condition, and was confined to bed for a number of weeks.

In 1948 he moved from 38 Bloomsbury Street to a flat in Museum Mansions a short distance away. Later that year he was staying at a nursing home in Richmond, Surrey when he discovered a small mews cottage for sale to the rear of Norfolk Lodge, a large house near the top of Richmond Hill. The wife of one of his young associates bought the cottage and he moved in at the end of 1948. In 1950 the lease for the ground floor of Norfolk Lodge was obtained and Mitrinović's books were transferred there. As in his other homes, three rooms were set aside to symbolise the three key dimensions of life, with the books allocated accordingly: science and philosophy, the arts, and religion.

By this time he was very ill and could only walk with difficulty. Yet he seemed consumed with a desire to somehow finish 'all that he had to say'. He continued trying to communicate with those around him, dictating notes, continually questioning his companions to ensure that they had grasped the essence of what he was trying to convey. Eventually his condition deteriorated to such an extent that he was confined to bed. He directed that a number of symbolic objects be arranged around his room – such items as a copy of Lao Tse, a book of Serbian folk tales and a Christian cross, all of personal significance to him.

He once confessed that he had only one regret about death, that thinking was not possible in this state. He viewed death as a serious event which one should try to experience to its fullest, and wanted to be conscious to the very end. Philip Mairet recalled an occasion when a group of them had been speculating on the possibility of life after death. Mitrinović remarked with some conviction: 'Do not doubt, the decisive instant of *thanatolysis*, the moment of liberation from this here-below – this is a moment of the highest, purest *bliss*.²⁸ As someone who was regarded by so many of

those who met him as possessing 'extra-normal' powers of perception and insight, Mitrinović had often been asked for his views on death and the likelihood of life after death. He would refer the questioner to the perspectives provided by the Three Revelations: the belief in reincarnation embodied in Eastern religions, the faith in everlasting life proclaimed by Christians, and the extinction of life once the heart and brain had ceased to function that scientific knowledge affirmed. There was no single answer, no easy solace.

David Davies recalled a typically cryptic remark made to him by Mitrinović in the 1930s when the *New Britain Weekly* was about to be launched: 'There is, David, only one thing really important and that is to learn how to die so that you will be sure of resurrection.'⁹ Dimitrije Mitrinović died on August 28th 1953. During the last week he was only intermittently conscious and refused to receive any visitors apart from those who were administering to his needs – Dr. Ralph Twentyman, Dr. Karl Köenig, Dr. Morris Robb, and the women who were his nurses. He was buried in Highgate Cemetery next to his brother. He left no instructions for his friends and followers, no details about how they were to dispose of his books and paintings. He also left considerable financial debts – but they were no longer of any concern to him.

A few months after his death a commemoration meeting was held in London. Friends and associates gathered together to remember and thereby honour the man who had played such a significant part in their lives. Reading through the record of that meeting, the theme that emerges is the tremendous impact Mitrinović as a person made on those with whom he came into contact. In particular it was his awesome ability to 'read' another person, to 'see' within them as if he had known them for a lifetime. Thus, the Reverend Dr. Belden recalled that: 'It was quite an experience to meet a man who knows his own mind thoroughly and to discover, at the same time, that he knows you before you have opened your mouth almost.' In similar vein Dr. Morris Robb, who had been associated with Mitrinović since the days of the Adler Society, observed that however long people knew him 'they were always guessing because they could not reach his elevation, his breadth, his depth; but always he knew them and this remarkable ability to know a person was something that I have never seen to that degree anywhere else'.

Evidently Goethe once said of himself that there was no vice or crime of which he could not detect a similar tendency within himself. For Otto Weininger this was one of the hallmarks of 'genius': someone who was so aware of their own inner experience that they were conscious of containing within themselves a far greater range of conflicting human qualities and dimensions than the average person. As a consequence the genius was one who could understand the nature – the virtues and the vices – of a wide diversity of types of people, because they were aware of possessing the same range of characteristics within themselves. From Weininger's perspective, 'the genius is the man who contains in himself the greatest number of others in the most active way.'¹⁰

To the extent that each and everyone of us possesses the ability to feel some kinship, some degree of identification, with those around us, then we can be said to possess some of the quality of genius in Weininger's sense, however latent such genius might be. It was this quality and capacity which was perhaps the distinguishing feature of Mitrinović's character. His almost uncanny ability to 'see' a person as if they were transparent, and the breadth and depth of his character to which Morris Robb referred, were part and parcel of the same highly developed level of self-awareness, and therefore awareness of others. As someone who was particularly conscious of the different elements within his own nature, he was acutely aware of the different aspects of human nature within and around him.

According to those who were closest to him Mitrinović was not only aware of these different elements within himself, he was also able to choose which aspect he would express at any one time. Therein lay his ability to get on with such a wide range of people. As one of his long-time associates tried to express it:

He seemed to include so many nationalities and aspects of human beings in himself that he could be comprehended by different people – so that if you were English you saw 'Englishness' in him, if Serbian you saw Serbian. ... He was not a foreigner, he was a total human being. The nearest to a total human being that I have ever met.¹¹

In exploring the life of Mitrinović it was this aspect of the man that I found most difficult to comprehend, leaving me frustrated so many times with my inability to grasp his 'essential core' and a corresponding difficulty in making sense of his writings without the aid of some of his closest associates, who showed tremendous

patience in 'translating' texts for me, whilst assuring me that DM could express himself with the utmost clarity if he so wished. This was just more evidence of his chameleon-like character, changing his persona to fit the context. The deeper I probed, the more their answers seemed to highlight the paradoxical and contradictory nature of the man. For example, he once remarked that he never did anything unless he had three different ideas on hand at the same time, yet those who I interviewed affirmed that he could be totally spontaneous on occasions and really let his emotions flow. At the same time they felt that he possessed almost complete self-control, that he was always aware of what he was doing.

If the 'real Mitrinović' remained camouflaged by his words and his self-control, his actions and relationships with other people revealed to those who knew him someone who was essentially 'for' them. Whatever happened, they were convinced that he acknowledged and respected them as unique individuals in their own right and as such they had his loyalty. No matter how they might suffer under the onslaught of his rage or his criticism, no matter how they might disagree with him, they knew that in the final analysis they could turn to him and call upon him, and he would be ready for them. Here is Jack Murphy's recollection:

(He) was one of the best men that I have ever met to disagree with. He understood the meaning of tolerance. He did not regard tolerance as, you know, just dismissing the other fellow and saying 'Let him have his say, it is a lot of rubbish anyhow.' What he meant, really, by tolerance was, 'You hold to your view, you have a right to it. Be yourself. You are a person. Think it out and go ahead, and I am going to go with you.' It was that 'going with you' when you knew quite well you were drifting which was so wonderfully binding. Here was real humanism. ... He was one of the best-living socialists, in terms of personal life, I have ever met. Socialism to him did not just mean a theory of state organisation. It meant personal cooperation with his fellow-men and even when we were differing most profoundly with regard to theoretical ideas on this, that and the other, that bond was getting tighter and tighter between us until I say quite frankly when Mitrinović died ... I felt I had lost a brother, one of my own family.¹²

In this tribute Jack Murphy, in his own way, went to the heart of Mitrinović's philosophy and practice. Whilst so much of his writing and talking was concerned with sketching out a vision of the world as a single developing organism within which he located the

various schemes for restructuring the economic and political systems of society – through guild socialism, monetary reform, federation and devolution – at the core was the concern with the individual in relationship with others. He sought the creation of a truly human family or household unconfined by ties of blood and kin as fundamental to the regeneration of the social order. It was Mitrinović's insight, which he shared with other 'utopians' of the *Blut-bund* such as Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber, that a new cooperative order cannot be imposed from above, but must grow organically from the grass-roots upwards, sustained and strengthened by the daily collaboration and comradeship of individuals. He realised, along with others before him and since, that the creation of a society free from domination and exploitation cannot be achieved unless the values of freedom and fellowship are embodied in the actual process of creation. Such values cannot be imposed, neither can they be created by mere talk: they must be lived in the daily round of one's life.

Landauer depicted the state as 'a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.'¹³ In other words, so long as people confront each other as alien and separate individuals, failing to actively acknowledge their common humanity, they make the coercive order of the state necessary. Such an imposed domination can be overcome only to the extent that we form new kinds of relationships that render the coercive power of the state unnecessary. Landauer used the term 'People' to depict this new relationship, arguing that socialism would only become a reality to the extent that people came together as a 'People', 'growing together into an organism with countless organs and members.'¹⁴ From this perspective we are always helping to destroy the state, making space for a new non-coercive social order, to the extent that we actively enter into cooperative caring relationships with our fellows.

In a way, the bulk of Mitrinović's life and work can be read as an exploration of the ways and means of creating such truly human relationships between people – a human household within which differences are acknowledged and respected, difficulties and disagreements honestly faced, but underpinned in the final analysis by a fundamental commitment of each to the other as people, as individual members of the wider human family. Like others

within the libertarian tradition, Mitrinović looked to what Martin Buber depicted as ‘the renewal of society from within, by a regeneration of its cell tissue’.¹⁵ Such a praxis is based on the insight that revolutions are rarely acts of social creation, but rather of deliverance, making free the space for the full flourishing of the new social forms developing within the womb of the old order.

Yet many of those libertarians and socialists who have realised that genuine change can come only from below have failed to move much beyond the depiction of the new age yet to be achieved and vague moral injunctions to individuals to change themselves in preparation for ‘heaven on earth.’¹⁶ Others have become pre-occupied with living the liberated life for themselves, without confronting the fact that such ‘advance posts’ of a free cooperative society will remain isolated prefigurative experiments unless there are also structural changes in the political and economic systems. This was clearly realised by Mitrinović. Whilst at different periods in his life his prime focus of concern shifted, he never lost sight of the fact that the new realm of existence of which he dreamed could never be realised without the transcendence of such obstacles as the state leviathan and the private ownership of the means of production. The programme of the New Britain movement – with its emphasis on workers’ control in the sphere of production, the utmost geographical and functional devolution and decentralisation of decision-making power, the radical over-haul of the financial and monetary system – addressed problems that are as pressing today as they were in the 1930s, indeed more so.

But what to make of his depiction of the world and humanity as a developing organism, the notion of the world as ‘one great mind in the process of becoming self-conscious’?¹⁷ Janko Lavrin no doubt would have dismissed such myths as the outpourings of a man with a ‘home-made messiah complex’. But oh how desperately we need such myths with the power to move us! Unless we do succeed in developing an approach to the injustices and dangers of the world which combines a respect for the integrity of the individual with an holistic awareness of the inter-relationship between all things, then a question-mark must be raised about the very survival of humanity. The exploitation and domination that are integral to our way of life within the developed world of the north are mirrored in the relationship between the north and the south, and are reflected everywhere in the way we treat the natural

resources of our globe – whilst the threat of nuclear warfare remains ever-present. When we cast round for ways out of this state of unsustainable barbarism, what do we find? On the whole the answers and remedies we get from the established and conventional authorities and technological elites are programmes of lesser evils, evils which can hardly be distinguished from each other. There is a crying need in the world for some wider, deeper vision. Without it we shall lose any sense of how we ought to live and how we might live. Whatever sense one makes of the particulars of Mitrinović's thought – however inappropriate to the contemporary age some of his images might seem – the lesson we should take from his life is to dare to dream about how the world might be reconstructed, and the courage to work towards that vision in true fellowship with those around us.

NOTES

1. Mitrinović observed to one of his companions that 'living nature has been wounded.'
2. Letter dated April 21st 1946, New Atlantis Foundation archives.
3. Notes of W. G. Fraser, 1946. New Atlantis Foundation archives.
4. Notes of W. G. Fraser, 1946.
5. *New Britain*, July 26th 1933.
6. *The New Atlantis*, no. I, October 1933.
7. Notes of W. G. Fraser, 1946.
8. Mairet (1981), p. 157. Emphasis in the original.
9. Commemoration meeting, January 29th 1954. In *The New Atlantis* of October 1933 he wrote in an editorial: 'To face individual death with spirituality and positive joy is greatness and health for the individual, and the sooner, and the more deeply and entirely any individual digests and absorbs in victory the idea and the ideal experience of the Universality of Awareness and of the non-existence of the separate self-hood, the sooner and the more worth and true is their second birth and their infinite awakening.'
10. Weininger, p. 107.
11. Personal communication to author.
12. Commemoration meeting, January 29th 1954.
13. Quoted in M. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, p. 47.
14. Buber, p. 46.
15. Buber, p. 99.

16. As the French personalist Emmanuel Mounier wrote: '... there is always a risk of mystification in the affirmation of spiritual values alone, unaccompanied by any precise statement of means and conditions for acting upon them.' E. Mounier, *Personalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, p. 102.
17. *The New Age*, August 26th 1920, p. 255.