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The Promise of Politics

Hannah Arendt

Edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kohn

THE PROMISE OF POLITICS

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CONTENTS

Introduction by Jerome Kohn vii

Socrates 5
The Tradition of Political Thought 40
Montesquieu's Revision of the Tradition 63
From Hegel to Marx 70
The End of Tradition 81
Introduction *into* Politics 93
Epilogue 201

Index 205

INTRODUCTION
BY JEROME KOHN

Hannah Arendt did not write books to order, not even to her own order. For evidence, one need look no further than the contents of the present volume, whose principal sources are two books that Arendt planned in considerable and evolving detail in the 1950s, and then abandoned. The first project stemmed immediately from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951, and was to be called "Totalitarian Elements in Marxism," indicating a matter she had not discussed in *Origins*. In the early 1950s, Arendt prepared a tremendous number of materials—lectures, essays, addresses, and entries in her thought journal—dealing not only with Marx but also, and increasingly, with his pivotal position within the great tradition of political and philosophic thought. Her principal insight, I believe, is that the tradition was consummated, and its authority shattered, when it returned to its source in Marx's thought. That meant two entirely different things to Arendt: it was the reason that Marxism could be used to inform a totalitarian ideology; but it also liberated Arendt's own thinking from the tradition, which became the real *raison d'être* of this first projected book.*

*The sources for the first half of the present volume include "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," six lectures in two series delivered to the faculties of

The idea for the second book, which Arendt planned to write in German, came to light during a visit to her mentor and friend Karl Jaspers in Basel in 1955. It was to be called *Einführung in die Politik*, or "Introduction *into* Politics,"* a title that by no means indicates an introduction to the study of political science or political theory but, on the contrary, a *leading into (intro-ducere)* genuine political experiences.† The most important of these experiences is action, which Arendt here calls a "hackneyed" term often used to obscure what she is intent to reveal. Analyses of what Arendt means by action—venturing forth in speech and deed in the company of one's peers, beginning something new whose end cannot be known in advance, founding a public realm (*res publica* or republic), promising and forgiving others—play a prominent role in these writings. None of these actions can be undertaken alone, but always and only by people in their plurality, by which Arendt means in their absolute distinctness from one another. Plural men and women have sometimes, though rarely, joined together to act *politically,* and have succeeded in changing the world that rises up between them. But thinkers, who in their solitary activity are withdrawn from that world, tend to consider *man* in the singular, or, which amounts to the same, *men* as multiples of a unique

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Princeton University and the Institute for Advanced Studies in 1953; a German radio address, "Von Hegel zu Marx," broadcast in 1953; "Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution," three lectures delivered at the University of Notre Dame in 1954; and a few contemporaneous entries from *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, two volumes, ed. U. Ludz and I. Nordmann (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2002).

*This is the way Arendt referred to the second book in English, though without the italics, which have been added here for reasons of clarification.

†The second book was intended to complement Jaspers's popular *Einführung in die Philosophie* (1950), which led its readers *into* the experience of communicating philosophic thought, a matter not high on the list of priorities of modern philosophers, with the exception of Kant.

species, and to ignore, or in Marx's case misconstrue, the experience of political freedom that Arendt sees as action's greatest potential. Hence action, as Arendt came to understand it, is largely missing from the tradition of political and philosophic thought established and handed down by these thinkers. In this sense the second projected book is the continuation of the first.

The tradition's historical origin, development, and culmination are discussed in the first half of the present volume, while our traditional prejudices against politics in general and our prejudgments of political action in particular are addressed at the beginning of the second half. It should be noted that these prejudices and prejudgments, which bridge the book's two halves, are taken seriously by Arendt as originating in genuine philosophic experience. Moreover, in the modern world,* with its unprecedented means of destruction, the danger that always lurks in the unpredictability of action has never been greater or more imminent. Wouldn't we be better off, for the sake of peace and life itself, to be rid of politics and political action altogether, and replace them with the mere "administration of things," which is what Marx had foreseen as the final outcome of the proletarian revolution? Or, on the contrary, would that be a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater? In the later sections of "Introduction *into* Politics" Arendt helps us answer those questions by clarifying the *meaning* of political experience. If human courage, dignity, and freedom are integral to that meaning, then we might decide that it is not politics per se but its prejudices and prejudgments that we should be free of. After so many centuries, however, such freedom probably can be attained only by judging afresh each new possi-

*Whose political beginning, for Arendt, dates from "the first atomic explosions." *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 6.

bility of action the world presents. But by what standards? That difficult question brings the reader close to the core of Arendt's political thought.

Let us imagine a time when traditional standards of judgment, such as moral commandments issued from the mouth of God, or ethical principles derived from immutable natural law, or practical maxims that have passed the test of universal reason, no longer correspond to reality. In such a time people would see traditional standards, even without denying their rectitude, as useless in prescribing what they are called upon to do in the actual circumstances of their lives.* Under totalitarian rule, as we know, people betrayed their families and killed their neighbors, not only in obedience to the dictates of their masters, but also in accordance with ideological laws governing the inevitable "progress" of human society. We may rightly say that these people acted without judgment, but the point is that in the light of the necessity of those higher laws of movement the very standards of family devotion and neighborly love appear as prejudices and prejudgments. Arendt came to understand that all rules—for good or evil, and regardless of their source—which purport to govern human action from without are apolitical and even anti-political. The depth of her appreciation of politics can be glimpsed in her contention that the only standards of judgment with any degree of dependability are in no sense handed down from above but emerge from human plurality, *the* condition of politics. Political judgment is not a matter of knowledge, pseudoknowledge, or speculative thought. It does not eliminate risk but affirms human

*This matter is discussed at length in "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in H. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 49–146.

freedom and the world that free people share with one another. Or rather, it establishes the *reality* of human freedom in a common world. The mental activity of judging politically embodies Arendt's response to the age-old split between two ways of life: the life of thinking and that of acting, philosophy and politics, with which our tradition of political thought began and in which our political prejudices and prejudgments are still rooted. The dichotomy between thinking and acting is characteristic of Arendt as it is of no other modern thinker, and though neither of the books she proposed writing in the 1950s was to be called *The Promise of Politics,* it is her emphasis on the human ability to judge that makes that title appropriate for this selection of the writings she prepared and did not destroy when the books themselves were laid aside.

Within months of the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt submitted a proposal to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, which is well worth looking at again. She began by noting a "serious gap" in *Origins,* a "lack of an adequate historical and conceptual analysis" of the "background" of Bolshevik ideology, and went on to say that "[t]his omission was deliberate." She had not wanted to dilute "the shocking originality of totalitarianism, the fact that its ideologies and methods of governing were entirely unprecedented and that its causes defied proper explanation in the usual historical terms." She would have run the risk of doing that if she had considered "the only element that has behind it a respectable tradition and whose critical discussion requires a criticism of some of the chief tenets of Western political philosophy: Marxism." Among the elements Arendt had dealt with in *Origins* were anti-Semitism, imperialism, racism, and nationalisms overrunning political borders, all of which were "subterranean currents in Western history," and none

of which bore any "relation to the great political and philosophical traditions of the West." They had emerged "only when and where the traditional social and political framework of European nations had broken down." But now, in her consideration of Marxism, she would provide "the missing link between . . . commonly accepted categories of political thought" and our uncommon "present situation."*

That last sentence represents an immensely significant shift in Arendt's thinking from the unprecedented elements of totalitarianism to the world in the aftermath of World War II. There is no reason to doubt that what she proposed was already in her mind when she was writing *Origins*, nor that she had omitted it from that work for the reasons she states. Indeed, at the beginning of the chapter that in its second and all subsequent editions concludes *Origins*,† the shift is clearly indicated: "the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form—though not necessarily the cruelest—only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past." The *authentic form* of the "predicaments" of *our* world is precisely what Arendt turned to in her projected work on Marxism. That does not mean, however, that her way of approaching her new topic would be less unorthodox than it had been in *Origins*. There, by rejecting causality as a category of his-

*The "present situation" of course refers to the Cold War. It is interesting to note that exactly three hundred years before, in 1651, another unconventional and controversial masterwork of political thought, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, was also published in times of political unrest. (Arendt's proposal is among her papers in the Library of Congress.)

†This chapter, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," was written in 1953, and at one time Arendt thought of using it in her book on Marxism (see her letter to H. A. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation, dated 29 January 1953, in the Library of Congress). The 2004 Schocken Books edition of *Origins*, which is the most complete and readable of all existing editions, includes Arendt's original "Concluding Remarks" as well as the later chapter. The quotation that follows can be found on page 460.

torical explanation and replacing it with a notion of "subterranean" elements *crystallizing* in a new form of government, and by drawing images from literary sources to exemplify those elements, Arendt raised the ire of historians, social and political scientists, and philosophers alike. But, she had no choice but to think apart from traditional categories—*ohne Geländer* ("without bannisters"), as she used to say—if she were to succeed in bringing to light an evil that was unknown and could not have been known within the tradition; and she had no choice but to exercise her faculty of imagination if she were to reexperience the hidden elements that finally, and suddenly, had coalesced and precipitated an explosion whose end, had it not been stopped, would have been the destruction of human plurality and the human world. For all its novelty, the horror of totalitarian domination was not "imported from the moon," as she put it more than once in the 1950s.*

Arendt's way of understanding would be equally unorthodox, but in one crucial respect different, in the voyage on which she was about to embark. In turning to Marxism as the "background" of Bolshevik ideology, Arendt certainly did not mean that it had caused Bolshevism. But her notion of crystallization was no longer feasible, for in no sense could Marxism be thought of as "subterranean." In Arendt's view, no justification of the crimes the Bolshevik dictators Lenin and especially Stalin committed in his name can be found in Marx. On the contrary, it was Marx's peculiar position in the mainstream of Western political thought that allowed her to judge the tradition, which she did by telling the stories of those who handed it down, and of those who stood their ground against it, or tried to. At the risk of repeating myself, it

*H. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 310, 404.

cannot be overemphasized that Arendt's point is not that totalitarianism issued directly from the tradition or from Marx, but that, as she said (in the same letter to H. A. Moe cited above), in Marx's thought, the tradition itself had "found its end," had done so much as a serpent can be imagined coiling about and devouring itself. That Marxism broke the authority of the tradition was at most a negative condition of Bolshevik totalitarianism. That neither the tradition nor its authority could be restored in the post-totalitarian world was decisive for Arendt.

The manuscripts Arendt prepared for her work on Marx are voluminous, and only a small part of them, in edited and occasionally spliced versions, are reproduced here. In the hundreds upon hundreds of existing pages, Arendt orients herself to Marx in distinct ways, sometimes emphasizing, despite his enormous and often unacknowledged influence on the social sciences, the nonscientific character of his thought. Sometimes she emphasizes what she calls certain "apodictic statements" that remain constant throughout his work and which, more than any system, disclose his political philosophy *and* explain why he left philosophy for economics, history, and politics. Sometimes she emphasizes common misunderstandings of Marx, especially by conservative critics, and differentiates Marxism from Marx's own role in the politics of his day, as well as the effect he had on laboring classes and labor movements throughout the world. And sometimes she views his "canonization" in the Soviet Union as the incarnation of Plato's philosopher-king. To make one coherent book, as I had long hoped and tried to do, out of these different if not incompatible approaches, came to seem more and more chimerical. The manuscripts go on and on and are replete with the kinds of insight we expect from Arendt, but they do not, as far as I can tell, come together and form a whole. It was a considerable relief to read what Arendt, when she was on the verge of giving it up, wrote of her

travail with Marx and the tradition to Martin Heidegger on May 8, 1954: "I cannot make it concrete without its all becoming endless."*

There is something odd about that, since ordinarily for Arendt, viewing a subject from a variety of points of view is what makes it "concrete" and real. In part it may be that the more she got to know Marx the less she liked him. At the end of 1950, when she was first beginning to think about his work, she wrote to Jaspers, who never had a high opinion of him, that she wanted "to rescue Marx's honor in your sight." At that time Arendt described Marx as someone "whom a passion for justice has seized by the scruff of his neck." Two and a half years later, in 1953, when she was well into the work, Arendt again wrote to Jaspers about Marx, this time saying: "The more I read Marx, the more I see that you were right. He's not interested in freedom or in justice. (And he's a terrible pain in the neck in addition.)"† From someone whom justice had seized by the scruff of the neck, Marx had become a pain in *her* neck. By then she was less concerned with Marx himself than with the tradition whose thread he had cut; she no longer thought of her work as "Totalitarian Elements in Marxism," but as "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," the title of the lectures she delivered the same year she wrote to Jaspers of her disillusion with Marx. Along with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Marx had rebelled against traditional patterns of thought, but neither they nor he, in Arendt's view, had been liberated from them. Her own liberation sprang from the advent of totalitarianism, which was as different as it could be from anything they had intended or foreseen; and though being liberated from the tradition is not in itself a new way of thinking about politics, that is

**Letters, 1925–1975 / Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger*, ed. U. Ludz, trans. A. Shields (New York: Harcourt, 2004), 121.

†*Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. L. Kohler and H. Saner, trans. R. and R. Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 160, 216.

what it called for. This seems to me the fundamental reason that she stopped working on this "endless" project and turned to, among other things, "Introduction *into* Politics."

It should be noted, of course, that Marx's reduction of all human activities to the necessity of labor provoked Arendt to differentiate labor from work as a world-building activity, and from action as the human capacity to begin anew, in *The Human Condition*. Marx's conflation of labor and work, leading to his notion of *making* history from a sort of blueprint of dialectical rules—which for Arendt meant at the expense of action and freedom—figures prominently in the same work. One of the 1953 lectures appears virtually verbatim as "Tradition and the Modern Age," the first essay in *Between Past and Future* (1961), and Arendt elaborated numerous trains of thought formulated in these writings in *On Revolution* (1963) and elsewhere in her published works. But it is also true that in her last uncompleted magnum opus, *The Life of the Mind*, published posthumously in 1978—her most profound philosophical examination of the complexity of the distinction between thought and action, *the* problem at the heart of the tradition—Marx seldom appears and then almost always negatively.

Be that as it may, the publisher and editor of this volume decided not to attempt to reconstruct from Arendt's manuscripts the Marx book as it might have turned out, under whatever title, had she completed it. In this case, that seemed a futile endeavor for the reasons already stated; moreoever, its final form cannot even hypothetically be known, since Arendt always exercised her freedom to alter any outlines, plans, and preliminary writings for a work in progress when she set about organizing it for publication. The decision was made to garner from the manuscripts previously unpublished materials embodying trains of thought that

chronologically and substantively precede "Introduction *into* Politics," and to let Arendt's words speak for themselves.

The editor's task was considerably simplified in dealing with the materials included here under the heading "Introduction *into* Politics." These German writings were published in Germany in 1993 in a remarkable edition by Ursula Ludz,* on whom I partially rely in what follows. The first selections, on political prejudices, prejudgments, and judgment, date from 1956 to 1957, while the later selections on the meaning of politics and the question of war and nuclear destruction are from 1958 to 1959. Though the project itself was abandoned for a variety of contingent reasons in 1960, Arendt still used its name for a course she gave at the University of Chicago in 1963. More importantly, before she let it go, Arendt had come to think of "Introduction *into* Politics" as a large, systematic political work, which as one work exists nowhere in her *oeuvre*. Originally envisioned as a short book, in April 1959 Arendt wrote to Klaus Piper, her German publisher, that it might become two volumes. The first volume eventually was turned into *On Revolution*, while the second was to contain the "introductory" writings proper. But just eight months later, Arendt wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation asking for support for an English-language edition of the work, which would now incorporate aspects of the Marx project. She specifically contrasted her new plan to *The Human Condition*, which had been published the previous year. *The Human Condition*, she said, "actually is a kind of prologomena to the book which I now intend to write," adding that the new book "will continue where the other book ends," and that "it will be concerned exclusively with action and thought."†

*H. Arendt, *Was ist Politik?*, ed. U. Ludz (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1993), 9–133.
†Cf. ibid., 197–201.

"First," she said, she would offer a critical account of the "traditional concepts and conceptual frameworks of political thinking," in which she included "means and ends," "authority," "government," "power," "law," and "war." As a model of what she intended to do, she offered her recently published essay on "What Was Authority?," in which her point is not only that political authority has passed from the modern world, but also that political authority is something entirely different from what it is taken to be in the so-called authoritarian regimes that have emerged since it passed and which mark its passing.

"Second," she said, she would examine "those spheres of the world and human life which we properly call political." In considering action and the public realm, she would be "concerned with the various modi of human plurality and the institutions which correspond to them." She would raise again "the old question of forms of government, their principles, and their modes of action." Finally, she would discuss the "two basic modes" in which plural human beings can be together, as "equals from which action springs," and "with one's self to which the activity of thinking corresponds." Thus the book would conclude with a consideration of "the relationship between acting and thinking or between politics and philosophy." But Arendt no longer thought of it as consisting of two volumes; on the contrary, its two parts were to be "so woven together that the reader hardly becomes aware of the double purpose."

In its final description, "Introduction *into* Politics" looms as a tremendous project that would only be completed in *The Life of the Mind*—or not completed even there, since Arendt died before writing its last section on judgment. The project traces the entire trajectory of Arendt's thought after *Origins*: from the inception of the tradition of political thought to its end; to what politics was

and is apart from that tradition; and to the relation, rather than merely the split, between active and mental life. Her work on "Introduction *into* Politics" was interrupted not only by her decision to fashion parts of it into the "exercises in political thought" that comprise *Between Past and Future*, and a large part of *On Revolution*, but also by the monkey wrench of thoughtlessness she encountered while attending the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. The abyssal meaninglessness of *not* thinking would occupy her in *Eichmann In Jerusalem* (1963) and the subsequent writings that are now collected in *Responsibility and Judgment*, and broaden and deepen her deliberations on the meaning of plurality in the mind's activites of thinking, willing, and judging. Her passionate commitment to politics is implicit in her final plan for "Introduction *into* Politics," and readers of *The Promise of Politics* will feel that passion in Arendt's explication of the tradition of political thought and the concepts and categories with which it attempts to grasp politics, "woven together" with her multifaceted account of the precariousness as well as the freedom of human action.

It is often said that Hannah Arendt is a "difficult" thinker, but insofar as that is accurate it is not because her thought is obscure but rather because of the inherent difficulty of what she sought to understand. She was one of those rare individuals who experience understanding as a passion, which in these writings runs parallel to her passionate espousal of politics. When scarcely more than a child she sought understanding in philosophy,* but as a young adult, a Jew uprooted from her native Germany, stateless and rightless, her eyes were opened to the *fragility* of human affairs. As she

**Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, 8.

remarks frequently, and here emphatically, because human affairs left to themselves appear uncontrolled, philosophers since Plato have rarely taken them seriously. This does not mean that Arendt ever stopped reading philosophy any more than she stopped thinking, but what she henceforth sought to understand—the relation that human affairs bear, in their fragility, to human freedom—she had to discover for herself. This was not only a question of the political establishment of rights in a free society, and it was not at all a question of establishing the political conditions of freedom as philosphers had variously defined it. Among the difficult things she came to understand was that the great thinkers to whom she turned time and again for inspiration, from Plato and Aristotle to Nietzsche and Heidegger, had never seen that the promise of human freedom, whether proffered sincerely or hypocritically as the end of politics, is *realized* by plural human beings when and only when they act politically. Even Kant, whom Arendt acknowledged as the source of much of her own understanding of human plurality, did not see, or at any rate did not formulate, its political equation with freedom.

A similar but more subtle way of missing what is at stake in the "difficulty" of Arendt's thought, I believe, lies in attributing it to the complexity of her mind. This is more than accurate—her trains of thought shift constantly with the perspectives from which she regards whatever she is thinking about—and more often than not its consequence has been that Arendt's "overall" meaning, which she never even attempts to spell out, is lost. Clear-sighted perseverance is required to discern and probe the trains of thought within each of her topics to arrive at a coherent political theory,* and apart from that effort Arendt's much

*Margaret Canovan succeeded in doing this in *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

vaunted "controversiality" tends to take pride of place. That Arendt had a theory of politics, distinct from but comparable to other political theories, is based on certain assumptions: first, that there is an "overall" meaning corresponding to the meaningfulness, the plurality of meanings, found in her work; second, that the "difficulty" of understanding Arendt can be overcome, even though she was inclined to leave the difficulties of what she understood intact; and third, that Arendt was primarily interested in making sense of the political realm for herself rather than in transmitting its sense to others. This is not the place to contest these assumptions point by point, except to say that to do so one would have to begin by considering Arendt's rejection of the theory that rationally discovered truth corresponds to phenomenal reality. What she calls the *aequatio intellectus et rei*—that truth *is* reality, that the concept of a thing *is* the thing, that essence and existence are the same—for her had been refuted by Kant's revelation of "the antinomy inherent in the structure of reason . . . and by his analysis of synthetic propositions." For Arendt, Kant had crippled the mind's pursuit of metaphysical truth "beyond" the particular meanings of appearances, or, as she puts it, "the unity of thought and Being." Moreover, she had seen the consistency as well as the correspondence theory of truth politically perverted in the totalitarian attempt to fabricate both reality and its truth at the price of human plurality.* In this, Marx was not altogether innocent.

What is crucial for Arendt is that the specific meaning of an event that happened in the past remains potentially alive in the reproductive imagination. When that meaning, however much it

**Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, 168, 354. Cf. "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 270–77.

may offend our moral sense, is reproduced in a story and experienced vicariously, it reclaims the depth of the world. Sharing vicarious experiences in this manner may be the most efficacious way of becoming reconciled to the past's presence in the world, and preventing our estrangement from historical reality. That Arendt intended her stories of the past to be heard by others was brought home to me in her seminar on "Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century." Though given in 1968, almost a decade after the latest writings in this volume, her emphasis on experiences in the plural situates the seminar in the company of the earlier writings. The first words she addressed to her students were "No theories; forget all theories." What she did *not* mean, she immediately added, was for us to "stop thinking," for "thought and theory are not the same." She told us that thinking about an event *is* remembering it, that "otherwise, it is forgotten," and that such forgetting jeopardizes the meaningfulness of *our* world.* She wanted us to remember some of the major political events—wars, revolutions, and the disasters that accompanied them—of the twentieth century in their succession. Arendt's students vicariously experienced these political events—from the outbreak of World War I to the Russian and Chinese revolutions to World War II to the existence of death and slave labor camps to the atomic destruction of two Japanese cities—as human (sometimes scarcely human) actions and sufferings that interrupted ongoing processes and started new processes, which in turn were interrupted by new actions and new sufferings and the processes they set in motion.

The body of the seminar was made up of the stories Arendt

*I am drawing from Arendt's outline of this seminar, which is in the Library of Congress, as well as my own notes.

told of these events in her own words, with the help, as in the pages of this volume, of poets and historians. These stories matter, she said, not because they are true but because in them the rapidly and radically changing appearances of the twentieth century are not explained away as a concatenation of events leading "God knows where." She convinced us that our predilection to view the realm of politics through ideologies—left, right, or center—as substitutes for inspiriting principles of action is a means of abolishing our own spontaneity, apart from which action of any kind is incomprehensible, just as human ingenuity, by applying "pure" scientific knowledge to technology, already possesses the means to destroy the entire world. These *mental* processes run alongside the destructiveness of the actions and processes whose stories we had been listening to and, she said, may be more firmly entrenched today than ever before. Of course she understood that, but she wanted us to understand it, too. Arendt's stories were painful, and she pulled no punches in telling them, and did not allow us to do so either, in our responses to them. No excuses or rationalizations of any kind were permitted for what had happened, yet curiously, the pain her stories inflicted was gradually supplanted by an emerging sense of the often terrible meaningfulness of the events themselves.

My work on *The Promise of Politics* brought back Arendt's seminar in memory, but recollecting it now, after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the continuing dissolution of its empire since 1989, which certainly has not ushered in anything like a Hegel-echoing "end of history," made me realize that these writings are even more demanding of attention today than when they were written or in 1968. Politically speaking, the Cold War dominated the 1950s and 1960s, but our current "war on terror" is not cold at all. Though it is certainly not possible to tell the whole

story of what is going on while it is going on, readers of the present volume stand to gain an understanding of a distinct way in which mentally remaining in the world of plural men and women, with their multiplicity of meanings or strictly relative truths, is at least as important and perhaps more urgent than reexperiencing the meanings of past events. Stories are thought-things, and though we think in the past dimension of time ("every thought is an after-thought"),* we judge in the present. As Arendt puts it in this book: "The ability to see the same thing from various standpoints stays in the human world; it is simply the exchange of the standpoint given us by nature for that of someone else with whom we share the same world, resulting in a true freedom of movement in our mental world that parallels our freedom of movement in the physical one."

In other words, the "true freedom" of judgment as well as action is not *realized* in vicarious experience, and in that sense judging rather than thinking is the political mental faculty par excellence. Judgment characterizes the stories that Arendt tells of what politics is, just as its opposite, the suprahuman rule of necessary truth over the mind, and the mind's rule over the body, characterizes the stories she tells of what politics is not. These stories deal with the past, often with the remote past, which indeed is remembered and thought about. On the one hand, her thinking about the past functions to prepare Arendt's faculty of judgment; and on the other hand, Arendt says quite explicitly that thinking did not always require judgment to affect the world. That it does now is itself a judgment of our world, and one so consequential that she would think us foolhardy if we were to let it pass unremarked.

*H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 87.

. . .

The Promise of Politics invites readers to join Arendt and the company she preferred to keep on a journey ranging over many lands and centuries. On the journey, readers may find judgments with which they disagree, but they certainly will find much that pertains to their own land and times. The journey begins in ancient Athens with Arendt's thinking dialogue with Socrates and Plato. Socrates comes forward as a man of flesh and blood who relishes the many opinions or relative truths, and the individual perspectives with which the Athenian polis opened itself to the plurality of its citizens. By choosing not to articulate his own opinion, which distinguishes Socrates from the others, his thinking represents the humanity of all the others. Action for Socrates is not commanded from without: in him the law of noncontradiction, which he is credited with discovering, governs his thinking, and as "bad conscience," also governs his actions. No one before Arendt, I believe, has insisted so firmly on that equation of thinking and acting in Socrates. What she means is that in Socrates' thinking, that is, in his living in accord with himself, the violation of another person would be the equivalent of self-violation. Socrates affects the human world without doing anything, which is moral political thinking of a high order, and which reverberates in the corpus of Arendt's work down to the twentieth century.

But it was not to last in Athens. When Socrates is unable to persuade his not-so-thoughtful judges of his conviction that thinking is good for them as citizens, he demonstrates the validity of his conviction by dying for it rather than altering it. That was *his* truth. Arendt believes that Plato's commencement of the tradition of political thought was due to the moral political tragedy of Socrates' legal condemnation by his fellow citizens. Of course Plato did not intentionally begin a tradition, but the extraordinary

power of his thought did just that when he constructed an "ideocracy," the *rule* of the idea of the good, in which there was no further need for persuasion. The one transcendent truth of that idea, beheld by the philosopher not so much in solitude as in speechless wonder, supplanted the many relative truths that Socrates relentlessly sought to bring to birth by questioning his fellow citizens. In the end, the citizens, by a remarkably slender margin, decided that answering Socrates' unending questions disrupted and impeded their pursuit of wealth and influence and other material interests. No doubt Plato saw that they were right, but he keenly understood—and violently opposed the fact that their interests stood in the way of a more compelling ethical ideal. What matters for the tradition is that Plato introduced the concept of rulership into the political realm, despite the fact that it originated in the thoroughly apolitical rule over household slaves. Ruling over slaves allowed the master to leave his private dwelling; liberated from tending to the necessities of life, he could enter the public space, the agora, where he moved among and spoke freely with his equals.

The complexity of this story, as in all of Arendt's stories, lies in her telling of it. But even when it is imagined in its richness, readers may wonder what Socrates did, other than think and ask questions, and what he inspired others to do, except to submit to unjust judgments. Arendt might reply that her story had been about what Socrates' thinking prevented him from doing; and that his questioning, in seeking relative truths in the opinions of his interlocutors, made the public space and the political activity that goes on within it more truthful. Arendt finds her answer to the question of what inspires political action centuries later in Montesquieu's revision of the tradition, in which he derives the principles of action in republics and monarchies from equality and distinction, the two essential aspects of human plurality. In Arendt's words, just before the section on Montesquieu included in this volume:

> Just as there exists no human being as such, but only men and women who in their absolute distinctness are the same, that is, *human*, so this shared human sameness is the *equality* that in turn manifests itself only in the absolute distinction of one equal from another. . . . If, therefore, action and speech are the two outstanding political activities, distinctness and equality are the two constituent elements of political bodies.

In that passage the political relevance of human plurality is made explicit, and it brings up something else about Plato's philosophic "tyranny of truth." Plato, Arendt tells us, in suffering the reception of truth passively—literally as a passion—destroys the plurality that Socrates experienced within himself when he thought, just as he did in others when he stopped thinking with himself to converse with them.* Plato frequently says that truth is ineffable, and if it cannot be put into words then his experience of one truth differs fundamentally from Socrates' quest for many truths. At this point readers may wonder if all we know about Socrates doesn't come from Plato, if indeed Socrates is not Plato's creation. I think Arendt would agree that everything that matters to her about Socrates is what Plato tells us about him. Plato's introduction of rulership from the private into the public realm is not only decisive in founding the tradition of political thought but is Plato's attempt to redress the injustice of Socrates' death.

Arendt sharply distinguishes the tradition of political thought from history. The tradition degrades political action into the category of means and ends, seeing action as the means *necessary* to

*One can hardly not suspect that Arendt saw a similar destruction of inner plurality in a philosopher much closer in time to her than Plato: Martin Heidegger.

achieve an end higher than itself. Though they play little or no role in the tradition, Arendt offers examples in which poets and ancient historians, whom she thinks of as judges in her sense of the term, speak of the "glory" and "greatness" of human deeds, thereby pointing to action's freedom from necessity. Jesus and Augustine, Kant and Nietzsche also point out aspects of action's freedom, all of which were forgotten in the tradition, though they remain alive in our "spiritual" history; and Cicero tries in vain to restore political action against its degradation in the tradition. Arendt sees the collapse of the long and strong tradition of political thought when Marx, so to speak, swallowed its beginning with his insight that rulership, in which he included governments and laws, stems from and establishes human inequality. There will be no division between rulers and ruled in the classless society to come, but there will also be no division between public and private realms, and there will be nothing like what Arendt means by political freedom.

Marx ended but did not depart from the tradition: standards derived from philosophy are useless for the progress of mankind, instead all men will become philosophers when the logic of their own development "seizes the masses" and enables them to realize the preestablished end of their action. Readers now may wonder what nontraditional thinking is, and they will find Arendt's answer at the conclusion of this volume in her threefold distinction of the categories in which political action can be understood. Its *meaning* lasts only as long as the action lasts, though it can be reproduced by poets and sometimes by judges; its *end* can be known only when the action is over; and its *goals* orient our actions and set the standards by which they can be judged. To these she adds Montesquieu's principles that set actions in motion. Arendt's analysis has to be read for itself, but here it may be said that if we knew the ends of our actions in advance, those ends

would not only justify but also "sanctify" any means to achieve them. The goals and principles of action, and action itself, would then have no meaning, and history would be as rational and necessary a process as philosophers of history, including Hegel and Marx, think it is. Human spontaneity, politically speaking, means that we do *not* know the ends of our actions when we act, and if we did we would not be free. When these categories are confused, especially today, politics ceases to make sense.

For many of us, our awareness, if not immediate experience, of brute, coercive force engenders a sense that politics moves through the world propelled by the means of violence, and that, all talk of peace and freedom notwithstanding, politics has become not much more than an automatic process run amok, wasting everything we cherish. Scientists have fused hydrogen into helium, bringing to earth a universal process that formerly went on only in distant stars. Technologists have transformed that process into weapons more than capable of annihilating not only ourselves but our world. We know that the prospect of thermonuclear war threatens the potential immortality of the world as never before. Here, if ever, political judgment is needed, and it is here that Arendt judges the possible destruction of our world by turning to the Trojan War, not as a war that is the "continuation of politics by other means" (in Clausewitz's phrase), but as a war of annihilation. This sustained passage, I believe, is one of the greatest in all of Arendt's writings, and nowhere does she exemplify more eloquently what she means by political judgment. Through the eyes of Homer and Virgil, and through her own judgment that goes back and forth between them, the Trojan War becomes real in its "tremendous manifoldness," not only observed but also "played out" from all sides. Both Greeks and Romans understood that a war of annihilation has no place in politics—even though, or perhaps because, the

Greeks had enacted and the ancestors of Romans had suffered the Trojan War—and invented two forms of political life that the world had never before seen, the polis and the republic, and two concepts of law. In both cases what stands outside the law, either as a boundary or as an organization of alliances, is a desert. In both cases violence destroys what the law makes possible, the world contained within the polis and the greater world that for the first time arose between formerly hostile peoples incorporated into the republic. These worlds are powerful and hard to destroy, but once destroyed unleash "processes of destruction" that are all but unstoppable. Arendt's judgment of the ancient Trojan War is not a judgment of the past but of our time and situation, and of what we call our domestic and international policies.

For Arendt, all destructive force, even when it is unavoidable, is in itself anti-political: what it destroys is not only our lives but also the world that lies between our lives and makes them human. A human and humanizing world is not manufactured and no part of it that has been destroyed can ever be replaced. To Arendt, the world is neither a natural product nor the creation of God; it can only appear through politics, which in its broadest sense she understands as the set of conditions under which men and women in their plurality, in their absolute distinctness from each other, live together and approach each other to speak in a freedom that only they can grant and guarantee each other. In her words:

> Only in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its objectivity and visibility from all sides. Living in a real world and speaking with one another about it are basically one and the same. . . . Freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of or . . . the freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world

> always is in its totality—most certainly was and is not the end purpose of politics . . . something that can be achieved by political means. It is rather the substance and meaning of all things political. In this sense, politics and freedom are identical.

In the epilogue to this volume, Arendt writes of a metaphoric desert-world, with life-giving oases of philosophy and art, of love and friendship. These oases are subject to ruin by those who attempt to adjust themselves to the conditions of desert-life, as well as by those who attempt to escape from the desert into the oases. In both cases the desert-world encroaches upon and devastates the oases of their private lives. The desert is a metaphor that ought not to be taken literally as a wasteland, or wasted land, envisioned as the final product of unleashed industrial expansion that depletes the earth's natural resources, pollutes its oceans, warms its atmosphere, and destroys its capacity to nourish life. The desert is a metaphor for our increasing loss of the world, by which Arendt means our "twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self."* She is not thinking, as she does elsewhere in these pages, of a catastrophe in whose aftermath only the "vestiges" of a destroyed civilization would remain. That could happen quickly, as the result of thermonuclear war or a new totalitarian movement rising from the conditions of the desert that are indeed most propitious to it. The desert is a metaphor for something that *already* exists, and in the world's constant need of renewal, of being "begun anew," *always* exists. So far from being caused by public political life, the desert is the result of its absence.

Arendt's metaphor of the desert was selected as the epi-

**The Human Condition*, 6.

logue for this work because the world-destroying evil—the reduction of plural human beings to one single massed man—which entered the world with Bolshevism and Nazism and, for Arendt, never since left the world, is the background against which she is writing. Though the desert is not that evil, today, insofar as we have become increasingly estranged from the public world, we are well positioned to fall into evil as into hell; into empty interminate space, where nothing, not even the desert, surrounds us, and where there is nothing to individuate us, to either relate or separate us. This is our predicament, in which only the roots we are free to strike, providing we have the courage to endure the conditions of the desert, can make a new beginning. In analogy to the way trees in the natural world reclaim arid land by sinking their roots deep into the earth, new beginnings can still transform the desert into a human world. The odds against that happening are overwhelming, yet the "miracle" of action is *ontologically* rooted in humankind, not as a unique species but as a plurality of unique beginnings. The promise inherent in human plurality provides perhaps the only answer to Arendt's chilling question: "Why is there anybody at all and not rather nobody?"

Men and women politically assembled in pursuit of a common goal generate power, which unlike force rises from the depth of the public realm and sustains it, as Arendt says, as long as they remain joined in speech and action. In times when the institutions of government and legal structures have grown old and become eroded, recollecting the rare occasions on which plural human beings have carried out and completed political actions, and recounting those occasions in stories, may not rejuvenate institutions or restore the authority of laws. Yet Arendt's stories may instill sufficient love of the world *(amor mundi)* to persuade us that the chance to stave off the ruin of our world is one worth tak-

ing. Her stories do not theoretically define political action, which is self-limiting, but they may make those who are attentive to them more politically minded, better citizens as it were, just as Socrates, who, without theoretically defining reverence,* after two and a half millennia still makes those who heed him more reverent and more humanly responsive to the world as it unfolds between them. My hope is that this volume of Arendt's writings will prompt readers to take her as seriously as she takes them, for in the end her need to understand for herself cannot be severed from our need to think and judge for ourselves. Her students can testify that Hannah Arendt welcomed thoughtful disagreements with her own judgments as signals of a more general agreement to renew the promise that beats in the heart of political life.

*No one appreciated Plato's endless ironies in the Socratic dialogues more than Arendt, and nowhere more than in the *Euthyphro*. With irony in mind perhaps I may be excused for thinking of τὸ ὅσιον *(to hosion)* as "reverence" and "responsiveness" rather than "piety," if only because Socrates' discussions that concern the gods—whether something is pious because the gods love it, or whether the gods love it because it is pious, as well as what pious men owe the gods—are all aporetic.

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THE PROMISE OF POLITICS

In the moment of action, annoyingly enough, it turns out, first, *that the "absolute," that which is "above" the senses—the true, good, beautiful—is not graspable, because no one knows concretely what it is. To be sure, everyone has a conception of it, but each concretely imagines it as something entirely different. Insofar as action is dependent on the plurality of men, the first catastrophe of Western philosophy, which in its last thinkers ultimately wants to take control of action, is the requirement of a unity that on principle proves impossible except under tyranny.* Second, *that to serve the ends of action anything will do as the absolute—race, for instance, or a classless society, and so forth. All things are equally expedient, "anything goes." Reality appears to offer action as little resistance as it would the craziest theory that some charlatan might come up with. Everything is possible.* Third, *that by applying the absolute—justice, for example, or the "ideal" in general (as in Nietzsche)—to an* end, *one first makes unjust, bestial actions possible, because the "ideal," justice itself, no longer exists as a yardstick, but has become an achievable, producible end within the world. In other words, the realization of philosophy abolishes philosophy, the realization of the "absolute" indeed abolishes the absolute from the world. And so finally the ostensible realization of* man *simply abolishes* men.

—from *Denktagebuch*,
September 1951

SOCRATES

I

What Hegel states about philosophy in general, that "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk,"* holds only for a philosophy of history, that is, it is true of history and corresponds to the view of historians. Hegel of course was encouraged to take this view because he thought that philosophy had really begun in Greece only with Plato and Aristotle, who wrote when the polis and the glory of Greek history were at their end. Today we know that Plato and Aristotle were the culmination rather than the beginning of Greek philosophic thought, which had begun its flight when Greece had reached or nearly reached its climax. What remains true, however, is that Plato as well as Aristotle became the beginning of the occidental philosophic tradition, and that this beginning, as distinguished from

*It is worth quoting in full the sentence from Hegel's Preface to his *Philosophy of Right* in which this famous image appears: *Wenn die Philosophie ihr Grau in Grau malt, dann ist eine Gestalt des Lebens alt geworden, und mit Grau in Grau lässt sie sich nicht verjüngen, sondern nur erkennen; die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.* ("When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then it has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.")—Ed.

the beginning of Greek philosophic thought, occurred when Greek political life was indeed approaching its end. In the whole tradition of philosophical and particularly of political thought, there has been perhaps no single factor of such overwhelming importance and influence on everything that was to follow than the fact that Plato and Aristotle wrote in the fourth century, under the full impact of a politically decaying society.

The problem thus arose of how man, if he is to live in a polis, can live outside of politics; this problem, in what sometimes seems a strange resemblance to our own times, very quickly became the question of how it is possible to live without belonging to any polity—that is, in the condition of apolity, or what we today would call statelessness. Even more serious was the abyss which immediately opened between thought and action, and which never since has been closed. All thinking activity that is not simply the calculation of means to obtain an intended or willed end, but is concerned with meaning in the most general sense, came to play the role of an "afterthought," that is, after action had decided and determined reality. Action, on the other hand, was relegated to the meaningless realm of the accidental and haphazard.

II

The gulf between philosophy and politics opened historically with the trial and condemnation of Socrates, which in the history of political thought plays the same role of a turning point that the trial and condemnation of Jesus plays in the history of religion. Our tradition of political thought began when the death of Socrates made Plato despair of polis life and, at the same time,

doubt certain fundamentals of Socrates' teachings. The fact that Socrates had not been able to persuade his judges of his innocence and his merits, which were so obvious to the better and younger of Athens' citizens, made Plato doubt the validity of *persuasion*. We have difficulty in grasping the importance of this doubt, because "persuasion" is a very weak and inadequate translation of the ancient *peithein*, the political importance of which is indicated by the fact that Peithō, the goddess of persuasion, had a temple in Athens. To persuade, *peithein*, was the specifically political form of speech, and since the Athenians were proud that they, in distinction to the barbarians, conducted their political affairs in the form of speech and without compulsion, they considered rhetoric, the art of persuasion, the highest, the truly political art. Socrates' speech in the *Apology* is one of its great examples, and it is against this defense that Plato writes in the *Phaedo* a "revised apology," which he called, with irony, "more persuasive" (*pithanoteron*, 63b), since it ends with a myth of the Hereafter, complete with bodily punishments and rewards, calculated to frighten rather than merely persuade the audience. Socrates' point in his defense before the citizens and judges of Athens had been that his behavior was in the best interest of the city. In the *Crito* he had explained to his friends that he could not flee but rather, for political reasons, must suffer the death penalty. It seems that he was not only unable to persuade his judges but also could not convince his friends. In other words, the city had no use for a philosopher, and the friends had no use for political argumentation. This is part of the tragedy to which Plato's dialogues testify.

Closely connected with his doubt about the validity of persuasion is Plato's furious denunciation of *doxa*, opinion, which not only runs like a red thread through his political works but became one of the cornerstones of his concept of truth. Platonic truth,

even when *doxa* is not mentioned, is always understood as the very opposite of opinion. The spectacle of Socrates submitting his own *doxa* to the irresponsible opinions of the Athenians, and being outvoted by a majority, made Plato despise opinions and yearn for absolute standards. Such standards, by which human deeds could be judged and human thought could achieve some measure of reliability, from then on became the primary impulse of his political philosophy, and influenced decisively even the purely philosophical doctrine of ideas. I do not think, as is often maintained, that the concept of ideas was primarily a concept of standards and measures, or that its origin was political. But this interpretation is all the more understandable and justifiable because Plato himself was the first to use the ideas for political purposes, that is, to introduce absolute standards into the realm of human affairs, where, without such transcending standards, everything remains relative. As Plato himself used to point out, we do not know what absolute greatness is, but experience only something greater or smaller in relationship to something else.

The opposition of truth and opinion was certainly the most anti-Socratic conclusion that Plato drew from Socrates' trial. Socrates, in failing to convince the city, had shown that the city is no safe place for the philosopher, not only in the sense that his life is not safe because of the truth he possesses, but also in the much more important sense that the city cannot be trusted with preserving the memory of the philosopher. If the citizens could condemn Socrates to death, they were only too liable to forget him when he was dead. His earthly immortality would be safe only if philosophers could be inspired with a solidarity of their own, which was opposed to the solidarity of the polis and their fellow citizens. The old argument against the *sophoi* or wise men, which recurs in Aris-

totle as well as in Plato, that they do not know what is good for themselves (the prerequisite for political wisdom) and that they look ridiculous when they appear in the marketplace and are a common laughingstock—as Thales was laughed at by a peasant girl when, staring up at the skies, he fell into the well at his feet—was turned by Plato against the city.

In order to comprehend the enormity of Plato's demand that the philosopher should become the ruler of the city, we must keep in mind these common "prejudices" which the polis had with respect to philosophers but not with respect to artists and poets. Only the *sophos* who does not know what is good for himself will know even less what is good for the polis. The *sophos,* the wise man as ruler, must be seen in opposition to the current ideal of the *phronimos,* the understanding man whose insights into the world of human affairs qualify him for leadership, though of course not to rule. Philosophy, the love of wisdom, was not thought to be the same at all as this insight, *phronēsis.* The wise man alone is concerned with matters outside the polis, and Aristotle is in full agreement with this public opinion when he states: "Anaxagoras and Thales were wise, but not understanding men. They were not interested in what is good for men *[anthrōpina agatha]*."* Plato did not deny that the concern of the philosopher was with eternal, nonchanging, nonhuman matters. But he did not agree that this made him unfit to play a political role. He did not agree with the polis's conclusion that the philosopher, without concern for the human good, was himself in constant danger of becoming a good-for-nothing. The notion of good *(agathos)* has no connection here with what we mean by goodness in an absolute sense; it means exclusively *good-for,* beneficial or useful *(chrēsimon)*, and is

**Nic. Eth.* 1140 a 25–30; 1141 b 4–8.

therefore unstable and accidental since it is not necessarily what it is but can always be different. The reproach that philosophy can deprive citizens of their personal fitness is implicitly contained in Pericles' famous statement: *philokaloumen met' euteleias kai philosophoumen aneu malakias* (we love the beautiful without exaggeration and we love wisdom without softness or unmanliness).* In distinction from our own prejudices, in which softness and unmanliness are rather connected with the love of the beautiful, the Greeks saw this danger in philosophy. Philosophy, the concern with truth regardless of the realm of human affairs—and not love of the beautiful, which everywhere was represented in the polis, in statues and poetry, in music and the Olympic games—drove its adherents out of the polis and made them unfit for it. When Plato claimed rulership for the philosopher because he alone could behold the idea of the good, the highest of the eternal essences, he opposed the polis on two grounds: first, he claimed that the philosopher's concern with eternal things did not put him at risk of becoming a good-for-nothing, and second, he asserted that these eternal things were even more "valuable" than they were beautiful. His reply to Protagoras that not man but a god is the measure of all human things is only another version of the same statement.†

Plato's elevation of the idea of the good to the highest place in the realm of ideas, the idea of ideas, occurs in the cave allegory and must be understood in this political context. It is much less a matter of course than we, who have grown up in the consequences of the Platonic tradition, are likely to think. Plato, obviously, was guided by the Greek proverbial ideal, the *kalon k'agathon* (the beautiful and the good), and it is therefore signifi-

*Thuc. 2. 40.
†Laws 716c.

cant that he made up his mind for the good instead of the beautiful. Seen from the point of view of the ideas themselves, which are defined as that whose appearance illuminates, the beautiful, which cannot be used but only shines forth, had much more right to become the idea of ideas.* The difference between the good and the beautiful, not only to us but even more so to the Greeks, is that the good can be applied and has an element of use in itself. Only if the realm of ideas is illuminated by the idea of the good could Plato use the ideas for political purposes and, in the *Laws,* erect his ideocracy, in which eternal ideas were translated into human laws.

What appears in the *Republic* as a strictly philosophical argument had been prompted by an exclusively political experience—the trial and death of Socrates—and it was not Plato but Socrates who was the first philosopher to overstep the line drawn by the polis for the *sophos,* for the man who is concerned with eternal, nonhuman, and nonpolitical things. The tragedy of Socrates' death rests on a misunderstanding: what the polis did not understand was that Socrates did not claim to be a *sophos,* a wise man. Because he doubted that wisdom is for mortals, he saw the irony in the Delphic oracle that said he was the wisest of all men: the man who knows that men cannot be wise is the wisest of them all. The polis did not believe him, and demanded that he admit that he, like all *sophoi,* was politically a good-for-nothing. But as a philosopher he truly had nothing to teach his fellow citizens.

The conflict between the philosopher and the polis had come to a head because Socrates had made new demands on philosophy precisely because he did not claim to be wise. And it is in this situa-

*For an elaboration of this matter, see *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 225–226 and n. 65.—Ed.

tion that Plato designed his tyranny of truth, in which it is not what is temporally good, of which men can be persuaded, but eternal truth, of which men cannot be persuaded, that is to rule the city. What had become apparent in the Socratic experience was that only rulership might assure the philosopher of that earthly immortality which the polis was supposed to assure all its citizens. For while the thoughts and actions of all men were threatened by their own inherent instability and human forgetfulness, the thoughts of the philosopher were exposed to willful oblivion. The same polis, therefore, which guaranteed its inhabitants an immortality and stability which they never could hope for without it, was a threat and a danger to the immortality of the philosopher. The philosopher, it is true, in his intercourse with eternal things, felt the need of earthly immortality less than anybody else. Yet this eternity, which was more than earthly immortality, came into conflict with the polis whenever the philosopher tried to bring his concerns to the attention of his fellow citizens. As soon as the philosopher submitted his truth, the reflection of the eternal, to the polis, it became immediately an opinion among opinions. It lost its distinguishing quality, for there is no visible hallmark which marks off truth from opinion. It is as though the moment the eternal is brought into the midst of men it becomes temporal, so that the very discussion of it with others already threatens the existence of the realm in which the lovers of wisdom move.

In the process of reasoning out the implications of Socrates' trial, Plato arrived both at his concept of truth as the very opposite of opinion and at his notion of a specifically philosophical form of speech, *dialegesthai,* as the opposite of persuasion and rhetoric. Aristotle takes these distinctions and oppositions as a matter of course when he begins his *Rhetoric,* which belongs to

his political writings no less than his *Ethics,* with the statement: *hē rhētorikē estin antistrophos tē dialektikē* (the art of persuasion [and therefore the political art of speech] is the counterpart of the art of dialectic [the art of philosophical speech]).* The chief distinction between persuasion and dialectic is that the former always addresses a multitude *(peithein ta plēthē)* whereas dialectic is possible only as a dialogue between two. Socrates' mistake was to address his judges in the form of dialectic, which is why he could not persuade them. His truth, on the other hand, since he respected the limitations inherent in persuasion, became an opinion among opinions, not worth a bit more than the nontruths of the judges. Socrates insisted in talking the matter through with his judges as he used to talk about all kinds of things with single Athenian citizens or with his pupils; and he believed that he could arrive at some truth thereby and persuade the others of it. Yet persuasion does not come from truth, it comes from opinions;† and only persuasion reckons and knows how to deal with the multitude. To Plato persuading the multitude means forcing upon its multiple opinions one's own opinion; thus persuasion is not the opposite of rule by violence, it is only another form of it. The myths of a Hereafter, with which Plato concluded all his political dialogues with the exception of the *Laws,* are neither truth nor mere opinion; they are designed as stories which can frighten, that is, an attempt to use violence by words only. He can do without a concluding myth in the *Laws* because the detailed prescriptions and even more detailed catalogue of punishments make violence with mere words unnecessary.

Although it is more than probable that Socrates was the first

**Rhet.* 1354 a 1.
†*Phaedrus* 260a.

who had used *dialegesthai* (talking something through with somebody) systematically, he probably did not look upon this as the opposite of or even the counterpart to persuasion, and it is certain that he did not oppose the results of this dialectic to *doxa,* opinion. To Socrates, as to his fellow citizens, *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what *dokei moi,* that is, "of what appears to me." This *doxa* had as its topic not what Aristotle called the *eikos,* the probable, the many *verisimilia* (as distinguished from the *unum verum,* the one truth, on one hand, and the limitless falsehoods, the *falsa infinita,* on the other), but comprehension of the world "as it opens itself to me." It was not, therefore, subjective fantasy and arbitrariness, but was also not something absolute and valid for all. The assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man according to his position in it; and that the "sameness" of the world, its commonness (*koinon,* as the Greeks would say, "common to all") or "objectivity" (as we would say from the subjective viewpoint of modern philosophy), resides in the fact that the same world opens up to everyone and that despite all differences between men and their positions in the world—and consequently their *doxai* (opinions)—"both you and I are human."

The word *doxa* means not only opinion but also splendor and fame. As such, it is related to the political realm, which is the public sphere in which everybody can appear and show who he himself is. To assert one's own opinion belonged to being able to show oneself, to be seen and heard by others. To the Greeks this was the one great privilege attached to public life and lacking in the privacy of the household, where one is neither seen nor heard by others. (The family, wife and children, and slaves and servants, were of course not recognized as fully human.) In private life one is hidden and can neither appear nor shine, and consequently no *doxa* is possible there. Socrates, who refused public office and

honor, never retired into this private life, but on the contrary moved in the marketplace, in the very midst of these *doxai,* these opinions. What Plato later called *dialegesthai,* Socrates himself called maieutic, the art of midwifery: he wanted to help others give birth to what they themselves thought anyhow, to find the truth in their *doxa*.

This method had its significance in a twofold conviction: every man has his own *doxa,* his own opening to the world, and Socrates therefore must always begin with questions; he cannot know beforehand what kind of *dokei moi,* of it-appears-to-me, the other possesses. He must make sure of the other's position in the common world. Yet, just as nobody can know beforehand the other's *doxa,* so nobody can know by himself and without further effort the inherent truth of his own opinion. Socrates wanted to bring out this truth which everyone potentially possesses. If we remain true to his own metaphor of maieutic, we may say: Socrates wanted to make the city more truthful by delivering each of the citizens of their truths. The method of doing this is *dialegesthai,* talking something through, but this dialectic brings forth truth *not* by destroying *doxa* or opinion, but on the contrary by revealing *doxa* in its own truthfulness. The role of the philosopher, then, is not to rule the city but to be its "gadfly," not to tell philosophical truths but to make citizens more truthful. The difference with Plato is decisive: Socrates did not want to educate the citizens so much as he wanted to improve their *doxai,* which constituted the political life in which he too took part. To Socrates, maieutic was a political activity, a give-and-take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality, the fruits of which could not be measured by the result of arriving at this or that general truth. It is therefore obviously still quite in the Socratic tradition that Plato's early dialogues frequently conclude inconclusively, without a result. To

have talked something through, to have talked about something, some citizen's *doxa,* seemed result enough.

It is obvious that this kind of dialogue, which doesn't need a conclusion in order to be meaningful, is most appropriate for and most frequently shared by friends. Friendship to a large extent, indeed, consists of this kind of talking about something that the friends have in common. By talking about what is between them, it becomes ever more common to them. It gains not only its specific articulateness, but develops and expands and finally, in the course of time and life, begins to constitute a little world of its own which is shared in friendship. In other words, politically speaking, Socrates tried to make friends out of Athens' citizenry, and this indeed was a very understandable purpose in a polis whose life consisted of an intense and uninterrupted contest of all against all, of *aei aristeuein,* ceaselessly showing oneself to be the best of all. In this agonal spirit, which eventually was to bring the Greek city-states to ruin because it made alliances between them well-nigh impossible and poisoned the domestic life of the citizens with envy and mutual hatred (envy was the national vice of ancient Greece), the commonweal was constantly threatened. Because the commonness of the political world was constituted only by the walls of the city and the boundaries of its laws, it was not seen or experienced in the relationships between the citizens, not in the world which lay *between* them, common to them all, even though opening up in a different way to each man. If we use Aristotle's terminology in order to understand Socrates better—and great parts of Aristotle's political philosophy, especially those in which he is in explicit opposition to Plato, go back to Socrates—we may cite that part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle explains that a community is not made out

of equals, but on the contrary of people who are different and unequal. The community comes into being through equalizing, *isasthēnai*.* This equalization takes place in all exchanges, as between the physician and the farmer, and it is based on money. The political, noneconomic equalization is friendship, *philia*. That Aristotle sees friendship in analogy to want and exchange is related to the inherent materialism of his political philosophy, that is, to his conviction that politics ultimately is necessary because of the necessities of life from which men strive to free themselves. Just as eating is not life but the condition for living, so living together in the polis is not the good life but its material condition. He therefore ultimately sees friendship from the viewpoint of the single citizen, not from that of the polis: the supreme justification of friendship is that "nobody would choose to live without friends even though he possessed all other goods."† The equalization in friendship does not of course mean that the friends become the same or equal to each other, but rather that they become equal partners in a common world—that they together constitute a community. Community is what friendship achieves, and it is obvious that this equalization has as its polemical point the ever-increasing differentiation of citizens that is inherent in an agonal life. Aristotle concludes that it is friendship and not justice (as Plato maintained in the *Republic,* the great dialogue about justice) that appears to be the bond of communities. For Aristotle, friendship is higher than justice, because justice is no longer necessary between friends.‡

The political element in friendship is that in the truthful dia-

**Nic. Eth.* 1133 a 14.
†*Nic. Eth.* 1155 a 5.
‡*Nic. Eth.* 1155 a 20–30.

logue each of the friends can understand the truth inherent in the other's opinion. More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different. This kind of understanding—seeing the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other fellow's point of view—is the political kind of insight par excellence. If we wanted to define, traditionally, the one outstanding virtue of the statesman, we could say that it consists in understanding the greatest possible number and variety of realities—not of subjective viewpoints, which of course also exist but which do not concern us here—as those realities open themselves up to the various opinions of citizens; and, at the same time, in being able to communicate between the citizens and their opinions so that the commonness of this world becomes apparent. If such an understanding—and action inspired by it—were to take place without the help of the statesman, then the prerequisite would be for each citizen to be articulate enough to show his opinion in its truthfulness and therefore to understand his fellow citizens. Socrates seems to have believed that the political function of the philosopher was to help establish this kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed.

For this purpose Socrates relied on two insights, the one contained in the word of the Delphic Apollo, *gnōthi sauton*, "know thyself," and the other related by Plato (and echoed in Aristotle): "It is better to be in disagreement with the whole world than, being one, to be in disagreement with myself."* The latter is the key sentence for the Socratic conviction that virtue can be taught and learned.

**Gorgias* 482c.

In the Socratic understanding, the Delphic "know thyself" meant: only through knowing what appears to me—only to me, and therefore remaining forever related to my own concrete existence—can I ever understand truth. Absolute truth, which would be the same for all men and therefore unrelated, independent of each man's existence, cannot exist for mortals. For mortals the important thing is to make *doxa* truthful, to see in every *doxa* truth and to speak in such a way that the truth of one's opinion reveals itself to oneself and to others. On this level, the Socratic "I know that I do not know" means no more than: I know that I do not have the truth for everybody; I cannot know the other fellow's truth except by asking him and thereby learning his *doxa*, which reveals itself to him in distinction from all others. In its ever-equivocal way, the Delphic oracle honored Socrates with being the wisest of all men because he had accepted the limitations of truth for mortals, its limitations through *dokein*, appearing, and because he at the same time, in opposition to the Sophists, had discovered that *doxa* was neither subjective illusion nor arbitrary distortion but, on the contrary, that to which truth invariably adhered. If the quintessence of the Sophists' teaching consisted in the *dyo logoi*, in the insistence that each matter can be talked about in two different ways, then Socrates was the greatest Sophist of them all. For he thought that there are, or should be, as many different *logoi* as there are men, and that all these *logoi* together form the human world, insofar as men live together in the manner of speech.

For Socrates the chief criterion for the man who speaks truthfully his own *doxa* was "that he be in agreement with himself"—that he not contradict himself and not say contradictory things, which is what most people do and yet what each of us somehow is afraid of doing. The fear of contradiction comes from the fact

that each of us, "being one," can at the same time talk with himself *(eme emautō)* as though he were two. Because I am already two-in-one, at least when I try to think, I can experience a friend, to use Aristotle's definition, as an "other self" *(heteros gar autos ho philos estin)*. Only someone who has had the experience of talking with himself is capable of being a friend, of acquiring another self. The condition is that he be of one mind with himself, in agreement with himself *(homognōmonei heautō)*, because somebody who contradicts himself is unreliable. The faculty of speech and the fact of human plurality correspond to each other, not only in the sense that I use words for communication with those with whom I am together in the world, but in the even more relevant sense that speaking with myself I live together with myself.*

The axiom of contradiction, with which Aristotle founded Western logic, can be traced back to this fundamental discovery of Socrates. Insofar as I am one, I will not contradict myself, but I can contradict myself because in thought I am two-in-one; therefore I do not live only with others, as one, but also with myself. The fear of contradiction is part and parcel of splitting up, of no longer remaining one, and this is the reason why the axiom of contradiction could become the fundamental rule of thought. This is also the reason why the plurality of men can never entirely be abolished and why the escape of the philosopher from the realm of plurality always remains an illusion: even if I were to live entirely by myself I would, as long as I am alive, live in the condition of plurality. I have to put up with myself, and nowhere does this I-with-myself show more clearly than in pure thought, which is always a dialogue between the two-in-one. The philosopher who, trying to escape the human condition of plurality, takes

**Nic. Eth.* 1166 a 10–15; 1170 b 5–10.

his flight into absolute solitude, is more radically delivered to this plurality inherent in every human being than anyone else, since it is companionship with others that, calling me out of the dialogue of thought, makes me one again—one single, unique human being speaking with but one voice and recognizable as such by all others.

What Socrates was driving at (and what Aristotle's theory of friendship explains more fully) is that living together with others begins with living together with oneself. Socrates' teaching meant: only he who knows how to live with himself is fit to live with others. The self is the only person from whom I cannot depart, whom I cannot leave, with whom I am welded together. Therefore "it is much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than *being one* to be in disagreement with myself." Ethics, no less than logic, has its origin in this statement, for conscience in its most general sense is also based on the fact that I can be in agreement or disagreement with myself, and that means that I not only appear to others but that I also appear to myself. This possibility is of the greatest relevance to politics, if we understand (as the Greeks understood) the polis as the public-political realm in which men attain their full humanity, their full reality as men, not only because they *are* (as in the privacy of the household) but also because they *appear*. How much the Greeks understood full reality as the reality of this appearance, and how much it mattered for specifically moral questions, we may gauge from the ever-recurring question in Plato's political dialogues of whether a good deed, or a just deed, is what it is, even "if it remains unknown to and hidden before men and gods." For the problem of conscience in a purely secular context, without faith in an all-knowing and all-caring God who will pass a final judgment on life on earth, this

question is indeed decisive. It is the question whether conscience can exist in a secular society and play a role in secular politics. And it is also the question whether morality as such has an earthly reality. Socrates' answer is contained in his frequently reported advice: "Be as you would like to appear to others," that is, appear to yourself as you would want to appear if seen by others. Since even when you are alone you are not altogether alone, you yourself can and must testify to your own reality. Or to put it in a more Socratic way—for although Socrates discovered conscience he did not yet have a name for it—the reason why you should not kill, even under conditions where nobody will see you, is that you cannot possibly want to be together with a murderer. By committing murder you would deliver yourself to the company of a murderer as long as you live.

Moreover, while engaged in the dialogue of solitude, in which I am strictly by myself, I am not altogether separated from that plurality which is the world of men and which we call, in its most general sense, humanity. This humanity, or rather this plurality, is indicated already in the fact that I am two-in-one. ("One is one and all alone and evermore shall be" is true only of God.) Men not only exist in the plural as do all earthly beings, but have an indication of this plurality within themselves. Yet the self with whom I am together in solitude can never itself assume the same definite and unique shape or distinction which all other people have for me; rather, this self remains always changeable and somewhat equivocal. It is in the form of this changeability and equivocality that this self represents to me, while I am by myself, all men, the humanity of all men. What I expect other people to do—and this expectation is prior to all experiences and survives them all—is to a large extent determined by the ever-changing potentialities of the self with whom I live together. In other

words, a murderer is not only condemned to the permanent company of his own murderous self, but he will see all other people in the image of his own action. He will live in a world of potential murderers. It is not his own isolated act that is of political relevance, or even the desire to commit it, but this *doxa* of his, the way in which the world opens up to him and is part and parcel of the political reality he lives in. In this sense, and to the extent that we still live with ourselves, we all change the human world constantly, for better and for worse, even if we do not act at all.

To Socrates, who was firmly convinced that nobody can possibly want to live together with a murderer or in a world of potential murderers, the one who maintains that a man can be happy and be a murderer, if only nobody knows about it, is in twofold disagreement with himself: he makes a self-contradictory statement and shows himself willing to live together with one with whom he cannot agree. This twofold disagreement, the logical contradiction and the ethical bad conscience, was for Socrates still one and the same phenomenon. That is the reason why he thought that virtue can be taught, or, to put it in a less trite way, the awareness that man is a thinking and an acting being in one—someone, namely, whose thoughts invariably and unavoidably accompany his acts—is what improves men and citizens. The underlying assumption of this teaching is thought and not action, because only in thought can the dialogue of the two-in-one be realized.

To Socrates, man is not yet a "rational animal," a being endowed with the capacity of reason, but a thinking being whose thought is manifest in the manner of speech. To an extent this concern with speech was already true for pre-Socratic philosophy, and the identity of speech and thought, which together are *logos,* is perhaps one of the outstanding characteristics of Greek culture. What Socrates added to this identity was the dialogue of

myself with myself as the primary condition of thought. The political relevance of Socrates' discovery is that it asserts that solitude, which before and after Socrates was thought to be the prerogative and professional *habitus* of the philosopher only, and which was naturally suspected by the polis of being antipolitical, is, on the contrary, the necessary condition for the good functioning of the polis, a better guarantee than rules of behavior enforced by laws and fear of punishment.

Here again we must turn to Aristotle if we wish to find an already weakened echo of Socrates. Apparently in reply to the Protagorean *anthrōpos metron pantōn chrēmatōn* (man is the measure of all human things or, literally, of all things used by men) and, as we have seen, Plato's repudiation that the measure of all human things is *theos*, a god, the divine as it appears in the ideas, Aristotle says: *estin hekastou metron hē aretē kai agathos* (the measure for everybody is virtue and the good man).* The standard is what men are themselves when they act, and not something which is external like the laws or superhuman like the ideas.

Nobody can doubt that such a teaching was and always will be in a certain conflict with the polis, which must demand respect for its laws independent of personal conscience, and Socrates knew the nature of this conflict full well when he called himself a gadfly. We, on the other hand, who have had our experience with totalitarian mass organizations whose primary concern is to eliminate all possibility of solitude—except in the nonhuman form of solitary confinement—can easily testify that if a minimum amount of being alone with oneself is no longer guaranteed, not only secular but also all religious forms of conscience will be abolished. The frequently observed fact that conscience itself no longer func-

**Nic. Eth.* 1176 a 17.

tioned under totalitarian conditions of political organization, and this quite independent of fear and punishment, is explicable on these grounds. No man can keep his conscience intact who cannot actualize the dialogue with himself, that is, who lacks the solitude required for all forms of thinking.

Yet Socrates also came in another, less obvious way into conflict with the polis, and this side of the matter he seems not to have realized. The search for truth in the *doxa* can lead to the catastrophic result that the *doxa* is altogether destroyed, or that what had appeared is revealed as an illusion. This, you will remember, is what happened to King Oedipus, whose whole world, the reality of his kingship, went to pieces when he began to look into it. After discovering the truth, Oedipus is left without any *doxa*, in its manifold meanings of opinion, splendor, fame, and a world of one's own. Truth therefore can destroy *doxa;* it can destroy the specific political reality of the citizens. Similarly, from what we know of Socrates' influence, it is obvious that many of his listeners must have gone away not with a more truthful opinion, but with no opinion at all. The inconclusiveness of many Platonic dialogues, mentioned before, can also be seen in this light: all opinions are destroyed, but no truth is given in their stead. And did not Socrates himself admit that he had no *doxa* of his own, but was "sterile"? Yet was not, perhaps, this very sterility, this lack of opinion, also a prerequisite for truth? However that may be, Socrates, all his protests not to possess any special teachable truth notwithstanding, must somehow already have appeared as an expert in truth. The abyss between truth and opinion, which from then on was to divide the philosopher from all other men, had not yet opened, but it was already indicated, or rather foreshadowed, in the figure of this one man who, wherever he went, tried

to make everybody around him, and first of all himself, more truthful.

To put it differently, the conflict between philosophy and politics, between the philosopher and the polis, broke out because Socrates had wanted—not to play a political role—but to make philosophy relevant for the polis. The conflict became all the sharper as this attempt coincided (yet it probably was no mere coincidence) with the rapid decay of Athenian polis life in the thirty years which separate the death of Pericles from the trial of Socrates. The conflict ended with a defeat for philosophy: only through the famous *apolitia*, the indifference and contempt for the world of the city, so characteristic of all post-Platonic philosophy, could the philosopher protect himself against the suspicions and hostilities of the world around him. With Aristotle the time begins when philosophers no longer feel responsible for the city, and this not only in the sense that philosophy has no special task in the realm of politics, but in the much larger sense that the philosopher has less responsibility for it than any of his fellow citizens—that the philosopher's way of life is different. Whereas Socrates still obeyed the laws which, however wrongly, had condemned him, because he felt responsible for the city, Aristotle, when in danger of a similar trial, left Athens immediately and without any compunction. The Athenians, he is reported to have said, should not sin twice against philosophy. The only thing that philosophers from then on wanted with respect to politics was to be left alone; and the only thing they demanded of government was protection for their freedom to think. If this flight of philosophy from the sphere of human affairs were exclusively due to historical circumstances, it is more than doubtful that its immediate results—the parting of the man of thought from the man of action—would have been able to establish our tradition of politi-

cal thought, which has survived two and a half thousand years of the most varied political and philosophical experience without its foundation being challenged. The truth is rather that in the person as in the trial of Socrates another and much deeper contradiction between philosophy and politics appeared than is apparent from what we know of Socrates' own teachings.

It seems too obvious, almost a banality, and yet it is generally forgotten that every political philosophy first of all expresses the attitude of the philosopher to the affairs of men, the *pragmata tōn anthrōpōn*, to which he, too, belongs; and that this attitude itself involves and expresses the relationship between specifically philosophical experience and our experience when we move among men. It is equally obvious that every political philosophy at first glance seems to face the alternative either of interpreting philosophical experience with categories which owe their origin to the realm of human affairs or, on the contrary, of claiming priority for philosophic experience and judging all politics in its light. In the latter case, the best form of government would be a state of affairs in which philosophers have a maximum opportunity to philosophize, and that means one in which everybody conforms to standards which are likely to provide the best conditions for it. Yet the very fact that only Plato of all philosophers ever dared to design a commonwealth exclusively from the viewpoint of the philosopher and that, practically speaking, this design never was taken quite seriously, not even by philosophers, indicates that there is another side to this question. The philosopher, although he perceives something that is more than human, that is divine *(theion ti)*, remains a man, so that the conflict between philosophy and the affairs of men is ultimately a conflict within the philosopher himself. It is this conflict which Plato rationalized and generalized into a conflict between body and soul: whereas the body

inhabits the city of men, the divine thing which philosophy perceives is seen by something itself divine—the soul—which somehow is separate from the affairs of men. The more a philosopher becomes a true philosopher, the more he will separate himself from his body; and since as long as he is alive such separation can never actually be achieved, he will try to do what every free citizen in Athens did in order to separate and free himself from the necessities of life: he will rule over his body as a master rules over his slaves. If the philosopher attains rulership over the city, he will do no more to its inhabitants than he has already done to his body. His tyranny will be justified both in the sense of the best government and in the sense of personal legitimacy, that is, by his prior obedience, as a mortal man, to the commands of his soul, as a philosopher. All our current sayings that only those who know how to obey are entitled to command, or that only those who know how to rule themselves can legitimately rule over others, have their roots in this relationship between politics and philosophy. The Platonic metaphor of a conflict between body and soul, originally devised in order to express the conflict between philosophy and politics, had such a tremendous impact on our religious and spiritual history that it overshadowed the basis of experience from which it sprang—just as the Platonic division itself of man into two overshadowed the original experience of thought as the dialogue of the two-in-one, the *eme emautō,* which is the very root of all such divisions. This does not mean to say that the conflict between philosophy and politics could smoothly be dissolved into some theory about the relationship between soul and body, but that nobody after Plato had been as aware as he of the political origin of the conflict, or dared to express it in such radical terms.

. . .

Plato himself described the relationship between philosophy and politics in terms of the attitude of the philosopher toward the polis. The description is given in the parable of the cave, which forms the center of his political philosophy, as it does of the *Republic*. The allegory, in which Plato means to give a kind of concentrated biography of the philosopher, unfolds in three stages, each of them designated a turning point, a turning-about, and all three together form that *periagōgē holēs tēs psychēs,* that turning-about of the whole human being which for Plato is the very formation of the philosopher. The first turning takes place in the cave itself; the future philosopher frees himself from the fetters which chain the cave dwellers' "legs and necks" so that "they can only see before them," their eyes glued to a screen on which shadows and images of things appear. When he first turns around, he sees in the rear of the cave an artificial fire that illuminates the things in the cave as they really are. If we want to elaborate on the story, we could say that this first *periagōgē* is that of the scientist who, not content with what people say about things, "turns around" to find out how things are in themselves, regardless of the opinions held by the multitude. For the images on the screen, to Plato, were the distortions of *doxa,* and he could use metaphors taken exclusively from sight and visual perception because the word *doxa,* unlike our word "opinion," has the strong connotation of the visible. The images on the screen at which the cave dwellers stare are their *doxai,* what and how things appear to them. If they want to look at things as they really are, they must turn around, that is, change their position because, as we saw before, every *doxa* depends on and corresponds to one's position in the world.

A much more decisive turning point in the philosopher's biography comes when this solitary adventurer is not satisfied with the

fire in the cave and with the things now appearing as they really are, but wants to find out where this fire comes from and what the causes of things are. Again he turns around and finds an exit from the cave, a stairway which leads him to the clear sky, a landscape without things or men. Here appear the ideas, the eternal essences of perishable things and of mortal men illuminated by the sun, the idea of ideas, which enables the beholder to see and the ideas to shine forth. This certainly is the climax in the life of the philosopher, and it is here that the tragedy begins. Being still a mortal man, he does not belong and cannot remain here but must return to the cave as his earthly home, and yet in the cave he can no longer feel at home.

Each of these turnings-about had been accompanied by a loss of sense and orientation. The eyes accustomed to the shadowy appearances on the screen are blinded by the fire in the rear of the cave. The eyes then adjusted to the dim light of the artificial fire are blinded by the light of the sun. But worst of all is the loss of orientation which befalls those whose eyes once were adjusted to the bright light under the sky of ideas, and who must now find their way in the darkness of the cave. Why philosophers do not know what is good for them—and how they are alienated from the affairs of men—is grasped in this metaphor: they can no longer see in the darkness of the cave, they have lost their sense of orientation, they have lost what we would call their common sense. When they come back and try to tell the cave dwellers what they have seen outside the cave, they do not make sense; to the cave dwellers, whatever they say is as though the world were "turned upside down" (Hegel). The returning philosopher is in danger because he has lost the common sense needed to orient himself in a world common to all, and, moreover, because what he harbors in his thoughts contradicts the common sense of the world.

It belongs to the puzzling aspects of the allegory of the cave that Plato depicts its inhabitants as frozen, chained before a screen, without any possibility of doing anything or communicating with one another. Indeed, the two politically most significant words designating human activity, talk and action *(lexis* and *praxis)*, are conspicuously absent from the whole story. The only occupation of the cave dwellers is looking at the screen; they obviously love seeing for its own sake, independent from all practical needs.* The cave dwellers, in other words, are depicted as ordinary men, but also in that one quality which they share with philosophers: they are represented by Plato as potential philosophers, occupied in darkness and ignorance with the one thing the philosopher is concerned with in brightness and full knowledge. The allegory of the cave is thus designed to depict not so much how philosophy looks from the viewpoint of politics, but how politics, the realm of human affairs, looks from the viewpoint of philosophy. And the purpose is to discover in the realm of philosophy those standards which are appropriate for a city of cave dwellers, to be sure, but at the same time for inhabitants who, albeit darkly and ignorantly, have formed their opinions concerning the same matters as the philosopher.

What Plato does not tell us in the story, because it is designed for these political purposes, is what distinguishes the philosopher from those who also love seeing for its own sake, or what makes him start out on his solitary adventure and causes him to break the fetters with which he is chained to the screen of illusion. Again, at the end of the story, Plato mentions in passing the dangers which await the returning philosopher, and concludes from these dangers that the philosopher—although he is not interested in human

*Cf. Aristotle *Metaph*. 980 a 22–25.

affairs—must assume rulership, if only out of fear of being ruled by the ignorant. But he does not tell us why he cannot persuade his fellow citizens, who anyhow are already glued to the screen and thereby in a certain way ready to receive "higher things," as Hegel called them, to follow his example and choose the way out of the cave.

In order to answer these questions, we must recall two statements of Plato's which do not occur in the cave allegory, but without which this allegory remains obscure and which it, so to speak, takes for granted. The one occurs in the *Theaetetus*—a dialogue about the difference between *epistēmē* (knowledge) and *doxa* (opinion)—where Plato defines the origin of philosophy: *mala gar philosophou touto to pathos, to thaumadzein; ou gar allē archē philosophias hē hautē* (for wonder is what the philosopher endures most; for there is no other beginning of philosophy than wonder . . .).* And the second occurs in the *Seventh Letter* when Plato talks about those things which to him are the most serious ones *(peri hōn egō spoudadzō)*, that is, not so much philosophy as we understand it as its eternal topic and end. Of this he says, *rhēton gar oudamōs estin hōs alla mathēmata, all' ek pollēs synousias gignomenēs . . . hoion apō pyros pēdēsantos exaphthen phōs* (it is altogether impossible to talk about this as about other things we learn; rather, from much being together with it . . . a light is lit as from a flying fire).† In these two statements we have the beginning and the end of the philosopher's life, which the cave story omits.

Thaumadzein, the wonder at that which is as it is, is according to Plato a *pathos*, something which is endured, and as such quite distinct from *doxadzein*, from forming an opinion about some-

*155d.
†341c.

thing. The wonder which man endures or which befalls him cannot be related in words because it is too general for words. Plato must have first encountered it in those frequently reported traumatic states in which Socrates would suddenly, as though seized by a rapture, fall into complete motionlessness, just staring without seeing or hearing anything. That this speechless wonder is the beginning of philosophy became axiomatic for both Plato and Aristotle. And it is this relation to a concrete and unique experience which marked off the Socratic school from all former philosophies. To Aristotle, no less than to Plato, ultimate truth is beyond words. In Aristotle's terminology, the human recipient of truth is *nous*, spirit, the content of which is without *logos (hōn ouk esti logos)*. Just as Plato opposed *doxa* to truth, so Aristotle opposes *phronēsis* (political insight) to *nous* (philosophical spirit).* This wonder at everything that is as it is never relates to any particular thing, and Kierkegaard therefore interpreted it as the experience of no-thing, of nothingness. The specific generality of philosophical statements, which distinguish them from the statements of the sciences, springs from this experience. Philosophy as a special discipline—and to the extent that it remains one—is grounded in it. And as soon as the speechless state of wonder translates itself into words, it will not begin with statements but will formulate in unending variations what we call the ultimate questions—What is being? Who is man? What meaning has life? What is death? etc.—all of which have in common that they cannot be answered scientifically. Socrates' statement "I know that I do not know" expresses in terms of knowledge this lack of scientific answers. But in a state of wonder, this statement loses its dry negativity, for the result left behind in the mind of the person who

**Nic. Eth.* 1142 a 25.

has endured the *pathos* of wonder can only be expressed as: Now I know what it means not to know; *now* I know that I do not know. It is from the actual experience of not-knowing, in which one of the basic aspects of the human condition on earth reveals itself, that the ultimate questions arise—not from the rationalized, demonstrable fact that there are things man does not know, which believers in progress hope to see fully amended one day, or which positivists may discard as irrelevant. In asking the ultimate, unanswerable questions, man establishes himself as a question-asking being. This is the reason that science, which asks answerable questions, owes its origin to philosophy, an origin that remains its ever-present source throughout the generations. Were man ever to lose the faculty of asking ultimate questions, he would by the same token lose his faculty of asking answerable questions. He would cease to be a question-asking being, which would be the end, not only of philosophy, but of science as well. As far as philosophy is concerned, if it is true that it begins with *thaumadzein* and ends with speechlessness, then it ends exactly where it began. Beginning and end are here the same, which is the most fundamental of the so-called vicious circles that one may find in so many strictly philosophical arguments.

It is this philosophical shock of which Plato speaks that permeates all great philosophies and that separates the philosopher who endures it from those with whom he lives. And the difference between the philosophers, who are few, and the multitude is by no means—as Plato already indicated—that the majority know nothing of the *pathos* of wonder, but rather that they refuse to endure it. This refusal is expressed in *doxadzein,* in forming opinions on matters about which man cannot hold opinions because the common and commonly accepted standards of common sense do not here apply. *Doxa,* in other words, could become the oppo-

site of truth because *doxadzein* is indeed the opposite of *thaumadzein*. Having opinions goes wrong when it concerns those matters which we know only in speechless wonder at what is.

The philosopher, who, so to speak, is an expert in wondering and in asking those questions which arise out of wondering—and when Nietzsche says that the philosopher is the man about whom extraordinary things happen all the time, he alludes to the same matter—finds himself in a twofold conflict with the polis. Since his ultimate experience is one of speechlessness, he has put himself outside the political realm in which the highest faculty of man is, precisely, speech—*logon echōn* is what makes man a *dzōon politikon*, a political being. The philosophical shock, moreover, strikes man in his singularity, that is, neither in his equality with all others nor in his absolute distinctness from them. In this shock, man in the singular, as it were, is for one fleeting moment confronted with the whole of the universe, as he will be confronted again only at the moment of his death. He is to an extent alienated from the city of men, which can only look with suspicion on everything that concerns man in the singular.

Yet even worse in its consequences is the other conflict that threatens the life of the philosopher. Since the *pathos* of wonder is not alien to men but, on the contrary, one of the most general characteristics of the human condition, and since the way out of it for the many is to form opinions where they are not appropriate, the philosopher will inevitably fall into conflict with these opinions, which he finds intolerable. And since his own experience of speechlessness expresses itself only in the raising of unanswerable questions, he has indeed one decisive disadvantage the moment he returns to the political realm. He is the only one who does not know, the only one who has no distinct and clearly defined *doxa* to compete with other opinions, the truth or untruth

of which common sense wants to decide—that is, that sixth sense which we not only all have in common but which fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world. If the philosopher starts to speak into this world of common sense, to which belong also our commonly accepted prejudices and judgments, he will always be tempted to speak in terms of non-sense, or—to use once more Hegel's phrase—to turn common sense upside down.

This danger arose with the beginning of our great philosophical tradition, with Plato and, to a lesser extent, with Aristotle. The philosopher, overly conscious, because of the trial of Socrates, of the inherent incompatibility between the fundamental philosophical and the fundamental political experiences, generalized the initial and initiating shock of *thaumadzein*. The Socratic position was lost in this process, not because Socrates did not leave any writings behind or because Plato willfully distorted him, but because the Socratic insights, born out of a still-intact relationship between politics and the specifically philosophical experience, was lost. For what is true for this wonder, with which all philosophy begins, is not true for the ensuing solitary dialogue itself. Solitude, or the thinking dialogue of the two-in-one, is an integral part of being and living together with others, and in this solitude the philosopher too cannot help but form opinions—he too arrives at his own *doxa*. His distinction from his fellow citizens is not that he possesses any special truth from which the multitude is excluded, but that he remains always ready to endure the *pathos* of wonder and thereby avoids the dogmatism of mere opinion holders. In order to be able to compete with this dogmatism of *doxadzein*, Plato proposed to prolong indefinitely the speechless wonder which is at the beginning and end of philosophy. He tried to develop into a way of life (the *bios theōrētikos*) what can be only

a fleeting moment or, to take Plato's own metaphor, the flying spark of fire between two flint stones. In this attempt the philosopher establishes himself, bases his whole existence on that singularity which he experienced when he endured the *pathos* of *thaumadzein*. And by this he destroys the plurality of the human condition within himself.

That this development, of which the original cause was political, became of great importance for Plato's philosophy in general is obvious. It is already manifest in the curious deviations from his original concept, which are found in his doctrine of ideas, deviations due exclusively, I believe, to his desire to make philosophy useful for politics. But it has of course been of much greater relevance for political philosophy properly speaking. To the philosopher, politics—if he did not regard this whole realm as beneath his dignity—became the field in which the elementary necessities of human life are taken care of and to which absolute philosophical standards are applied. Politics, to be sure, never could conform to such standards and therefore, by and large, was judged to be an unethical business, judged so not only by philosophers but also, in the centuries to come, by many others, when philosophical results, originally formulated in opposition to common sense, had finally been absorbed by the public opinion of the educated. Politics and government or rulership were identified and both considered to be a reflection of the wickedness of human nature, just as the record of the deeds and sufferings of men was seen as a reflection of human sinfulness. Yet while Plato's inhuman ideal state never became a reality, and the usefulness of philosophy had to be defended throughout the centuries—since in actual political action it proved utterly useless—philosophy rendered one signal service to Western man. Because Plato in a sense deformed philosophy for political purposes, philosophy continued to provide

standards and rules, yardsticks and measurements with which the human mind could at least attempt to understand what was happening in the realm of human affairs. It is this usefulness for understanding that was exhausted with the approach of the modern age. Machiavelli's writings are the first sign of this exhaustion, and in Hobbes we find, for the first time, a philosophy which has no use for philosophy but pretends to proceed from what common sense takes for granted. And Marx, who is the last political philosopher of the West and who still stands in the tradition that began with Plato, finally tried to turn this tradition, its fundamental categories and hierarchy of values, upside down. With this reversal, the tradition had indeed come to its end.

Tocqueville's remark that "as the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity" was written out of a situation in which the philosophical categories of the past were no longer sufficient for understanding. We live today in a world in which not even common sense makes sense any longer. The breakdown of common sense in the present world signals that philosophy and politics, their old conflict notwithstanding, have suffered the same fate. And that means that the problem of philosophy and politics, or the necessity for a new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics, is once more on the agenda.

Philosophy, political philosophy like all its other branches, will never be able to deny its origin in *thaumadzein*, in the wonder at that which is as it is. If philosophers, despite their necessary estrangement from the everyday life of human affairs, were ever to arrive at a true political philosophy, they would have to make the plurality of man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs—in its grandeur and misery—the object of their *thaumadzein*. Biblically speaking, they would have to accept—as

they accept in speechless wonder the miracle of the universe, of man, and of being—the miracle that God did not create Man, but "male and female created He them." They would have to accept in something more than the resignation of human weakness the fact that "it is not good for man to be alone."

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THE TRADITION OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

If we speak of the end of tradition, we obviously do not mean to deny that many people, perhaps even a majority (although I doubt this), still live by traditional standards. What matters is that ever since the nineteenth century, the tradition has remained impenetrably silent whenever confronted with specifically modern questions, and that political life, wherever it is modern and has undergone the changes of industrialization and universal equality, has constantly overruled its standards. This situation has been sensed by the great historical pessimists, and found its greatest, though least dramatic, expression in the work of Jacob Burckhardt. More surprising is that we find the first forebodings of impending catastrophe, not in the physical or strictly political sense, but as an imminent break of traditional continuity, in the midst of the eighteenth century, in Montesquieu, and slightly later in Goethe. Montesquieu and Goethe, neither of whom has ever been accused of being a prophet of doom, expressed themselves quite unequivocally on the subject.

Montesquieu writes in *L'Esprit des lois:* "The majority of the nations of Europe are still ruled by customs. But if through a long abuse of power, if through some large conquest, despotism

should establish itself at a given point, there would be neither customs nor climate to resist it." What Montesquieu feared is that only customs were left as stabilizing factors in eighteenth-century society, and that the laws which, according to him, "govern the actions of the citizen," thereby stabilizing the body politic as customs stabilize society, had lost their validity. Not quite thirty years later, Goethe writes to Lavater in a similar mood: "Like a big city, our moral and political world is undermined with subterranean roads, cellars, and sewers, about whose connection and dwelling conditions nobody seems to reflect or think; but those who know something of this will find it much more understandable if here or there, now or then, the earth crumbles away, smoke rises out of a crack, and strange voices are heard." Both passages were written before the French Revolution, and it took more than 150 years until the customs of European society finally gave way and the subterranean world rose to the surface, its strange voice heard in the political concert of the civilized world. It is only then, I think, that we can say that the modern age, beginning in the seventeenth century, actually had brought forward the modern world in which we live today.

It lies in the nature of a tradition to be accepted and absorbed, as it were, by common sense, which fits the particular and idiosyncratic data of our other senses into a world we inhabit together and share in common. In this general understanding, common sense indicates that in the human condition of plurality men check and control their particular sense data against the common data of others (just as seeing and hearing and other sense perceptions belong to the human condition of man in his singularity and guarantee that he can see by himself: for perception per se, he does not need his fellow men). Whether we say that the plurality of men or the commonality of the human world is its specific sphere of com-

petence, common sense obviously operates chiefly in the public realm of politics and morals, and it is that realm which must suffer when common sense and its matter-of-course judgments no longer function, no longer make sense.

Historically, common sense is as much Roman in origin as tradition. Not that the Greeks and Hebrews lacked common sense, but only the Romans developed it until it became the highest criterion in the management of public-political affairs. With the Romans, remembering the past became a matter of tradition, and it is in the sense of tradition that the development of common sense found its politically most important expression. Since then common sense has been bound and nourished by tradition, so that when traditional standards cease to make sense and no longer serve as general rules under which all or most particular instances can be subsumed, common sense unavoidably atrophies. By the same token, the past, the remembrance of what we have in common as our common origin, is threatened by oblivion. The tradition-bound judgments of common sense extracted and saved from the past whatever was conceptualized by tradition *and* was still applicable to present conditions. This "practical" common-sense method of remembrance did not require any effort but was imparted to us, in a common world, as our shared inheritance. Its atrophy, therefore, has caused immediately an atrophy in the dimension of the past and initiated the creeping and irresistible movement of shallowness which spreads a veil of meaninglessness over all spheres of modern life.

To a large extent, therefore, the very existence of tradition has resulted in its dangerous identification with the past. This identification, rooted in common sense, has demonstrated itself in the extraordinary consistency and comprehensiveness of traditional categories in the face of many and sometimes the most radical

changes. What could be more impressive than their survival from the decline of Greece to the rise of Rome, from the downfall of the Roman Empire to their (as far as the tradition of political thought is concerned) complete absorption by Christian doctrine? The radical changes in our historical past are greater—though we possibly are the worst judges in this matter—than anything that has happened since the beginning of the modern age, despite the fact that the political and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries challenged all traditional moral and political standards. The magnitude of modern revolutionary change is by far more profound only if we measure it in terms of tradition, but not if we compare it with the political upheavals of our history.

The end of our tradition is obviously the end neither of history nor of the past, generally speaking. History and tradition are not the same. History has many ends and many beginnings, each of its ends being a new beginning, each of its beginnings putting an end to what was there before. We can, moreover, date our tradition with more or less certainty, but we can no longer date our history. Modern historical consciousness—and it is very doubtful that any period in the past knew anything resembling it—began and found its conclusive expression when, not more than two centuries ago, the old practice of numbering the centuries from one definite starting point, the foundation of Rome, for instance, or the year of the birth of Christ, was abandoned for the sake of numbering forward and backward from the year one (cf. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, Philadelphia, 1950). What is decisive in this practice is not that the birth of Christ appears as the turning point of world history (as such it had appeared with greater vigor and meaning to many previous centuries without leading to this modern chronology), but that both past and future now lead into

an infinity of time, in which we can add to the past as we can add to the future. This double perspective into infinity, which corresponds most closely to our newly found historical consciousness, not only somehow contradicts the biblical myth of creation, but also eliminates the much older and more general question as to whether historical time itself can have a beginning. In its very chronology, the modern age has established a kind of potential earthly immortality for mankind.

Only a relatively small part of this history is conceptualized in our tradition, whose relevance lies in the fact that whatever experience, thought, or deed did not fit into its prescribing categories and standards, which were developed from its beginning, was in constant danger of oblivion. Or, if this danger was warded off through poetry and religion, what was not conceptualized was certain to remain inarticulate in the philosophic tradition and therefore, no matter how gloriously or piously remembered otherwise, without that formative and direct influence which only tradition, but neither the all-persuasive power of beauty nor the all-penetrating force of piety, can carry and hand down through the centuries. The defectiveness of our tradition with respect to our history is even more pronounced in the tradition of political thought than in that of philosophy in general. One could easily and most profitably enumerate at great length those political experiences of Western mankind which remained without place, homeless as it were, in traditional political thought. Among them can be found the early pre-polis experience of the Greeks as it existed in the Homeric world with its understanding of the greatness of human deeds and enterprises, which is echoed in Greek historiography. At the beginning of his work, Thucydides says he is telling the story of the Peloponnesian War because in his opinion it was "the greatest movement yet known in history."

Herodotus writes not only to save from oblivion all that men had brought into being, but also to prevent great and wonderful deeds from remaining without praise. Praise is needed because of the frailty of human action, which alone among all other kinds of human achievement is even more fleeting than life itself, utterly dependent on remembrance in the praise of the poets or the recording of historians, whose works, although they were not yet deemed to be greater than the feats themselves, were always recognized to possess more permanence.

The hero, the "doer of great deeds and speaker of great words," as Achilles was called, needed the poet—not the prophet, but the seer—whose divine gift sees in the past what is worth telling in the present and the future. This pre-polis past of Greece is the source of the Greek political vocabulary that still survives in all European languages; yet the tradition of political philosophy, beginning as it did at the moment of incipient decay in Greek polis life, could not but formulate and categorize these earlier experiences in terms of the polis, with the result that our very word "politics" is derived from and indicates this one very specific form of political life, bestowing upon it a kind of universal validity. Only rudimentary traces of the original meaning of such words as *archein* and *prattein* were preserved, so that whether we know it or not, when we speak and think of action, which after all is one of the most important and perhaps even the central concept of political science, we have in mind a categorical system of means and ends, of ruling and being ruled, of interests and moral standards. This system owes its existence to the beginning of traditional political philosophy, but in it there is hardly any room for the spirit of starting an enterprise and, together with others, seeing it through to its conclusion, which once animated the words *archein* and *prattein*. In classical Greek, *archē* simply has two

meanings, "beginning" and "rule," but earlier it indicated that he who begins is the natural leader of an enterprise that necessarily requires the *prattein* of followers to be achieved.

The point of the matter is that only human deeds were supposed to possess and make apparent a specific greatness of their own, so that no "end," no ultimate telos, was needed or could even be used for their justification. Nothing could be more alien to the pre-polis experience of human deeds than the Aristotelian definition of *praxis* that became authoritative throughout the tradition: "with respect to the beautiful and the non-beautiful actions differ not so much in themselves as in the end for the sake of which they are undertaken" (*Politics*, vii 1333a9–10). The difference between the things which are given by nature as part of the universe, as well as the universe itself, and human affairs that owe their existence to man was not that the latter are less great but that they are not immortal. Neither the mortality of man nor the frailty of human affairs were as yet arguments against the greatness of man and the potential greatness of his enterprises. Glory, the specifically human possibility of immortality, was due to everything that revealed greatness. In their sense of the greatness of human deeds and events, the Greek historians, Thucydides no less than Herodotus, were the descendants of Homer and Pindar. When they recorded what ought to be saved from oblivion for posterity because it was great, they were not concerned with the modern historian's care to explain and present a continuous stream of happenings. Like the poets, they told their stories for the sake of human glory; in this respect poetry and history have still essentially the same subject, namely the actions of men, which determine their lives and in which their good or bad fortune resides (cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, vi 1450a 12–13). The sense that human greatness can reveal itself nowhere else but in doing and

suffering is still apparent in Burckhardt's notion of "historic greatness," and it has always been present in poetry and drama. It was never even considered by our tradition of political thought, which began after the ideal of the hero, the "doer of great deeds and speaker of great words," had given way to that of the statesman as lawgiver, whose function was not to act but to impose permanent rules on the changing circumstances and unstable affairs of acting men.

This insulation shown by our tradition from its beginning against all political experiences that did not fit into its framework—even if these were the experiences of its own direct past, so that its vocabulary had to be re-interpreted and the words given new meanings—has remained one of its outstanding features. The mere tendency to exclude everything that was not consistent developed into a great power of exclusion, which kept the tradition intact against all new, contradictory, and conflicting experiences. To be sure, the tradition could prevent these experiences neither from occurring nor from exerting their formative influences on the actual spiritual life of Western mankind. Sometimes this influence was all the greater because there was no corresponding articulate thought to serve as a basis for argument or reconsideration, with the result that its content was taken for granted. This is notably the case for our understanding of tradition itself, which is Roman in origin and rests on a specifically Roman political experience that itself plays hardly any role in the history of political thought.

In great contrast to the early pre-polis as well as the polis experience of Greek history stands the Roman experience according to which political action consists in the foundation and preservation of a *civitas*. In a sense, the conviction of the sacredness of foundation as a binding force for all future generations corre-

sponds to the one specifically Greek political experience from which we learn, from only a few sources in Greek literature, how great a role it must have played in the life of the Greek city-states: the experience of colonization, the departure of citizens from home, wandering in search of a new land and the eventual foundation of a new polis. This is the ever-present meaning of the sufferings and wanderings told in the *Aeneid*, which all have one goal and come to their end in the foundation of Rome—*dum conderet urbem*—which Virgil in the beginning of his epic sums up in a single line: *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem* (i, 35). So great was the effort and pain to found the people of Rome, repeated by Roman poets and historians alike as the beginning of their history, that through the *Aeneid*'s foundation legend the Roman populace bound itself to Greek history, just as it learned its own alphabet from the Greek colony of Cumae. This binding was done with a precision for which we must always be grateful, ever marveling at a history that apparently never lost sight of, or forgot, or permitted to remain without consequences whatever was deemed truly great. At the same time that it took up the Greek experience of colonization, which was lost for Greek thought, Roman history incorporated the non-Greek political experience of the sacredness of home and family, which confronted the Greeks in Troy. It is preserved in Homer's praise of Hector, his parting from Andromache, and his death, which, so unlike Achilles' death, was not for his own immortal glory but was a sacrifice for the city and its families of the hearth and the home, in short for all that later the word *pietas* circumscribes, the reverent piety for the household gods (the *penates*) of the family and the city, the actual content of Roman religion. The *Aeneid* reads as though it was Hector who had been destined to suffer the fate of Ulysses, in the sense that the result of the wanderings is not a return but the foundation of a

new home, whereby both foundation and home rise with a new emphatic power.

It is because the Greek colonization experience became the central political event for the Romans that, distinct from the poleis, Rome was unable to repeat its own foundation through the establishment of colonies. The foundation of Rome remained unique and unrepeatable: the offshoots of Rome in Italy remained under Roman jurisdiction as no Greek colony remained under the jurisdiction of its mother polis. The whole of Roman history is based on this foundation as a beginning for eternity. Founded for eternity, Rome has remained even for us the only Eternal City. This sanctification of the gigantic, almost superhuman, and therefore legendary effort of foundation, the establishment of a new hearth and new home, became the cornerstone of the Roman religion, in which political and religious activity were considered to be one. In the words of Cicero, "there exists nothing in which human virtue accedes closer to the holy ways *[numen]* of the gods than the foundation of a new or the preservation of an already established *civitas*" (*De res publica*, vii, 12). Religion was the power that secured the foundation by providing a dwelling place for the gods among men. The gods of the Romans dwelled in the temples of Rome, unlike those of the Greeks who, though they protected the cities of men and might temporarily abide in them, always had their own home on Olympus, away from the homes of mortals.

This Roman religion, based on foundation, made it a holy duty to preserve whatever had been handed down from the ancestors, the *maiores* or greater ones. Tradition thereby became sacred and not only permeated the Roman Republic, but also survived its transformation into the Roman Empire. It preserved and handed down authority, which was based on the testimony

of the ancestors who had witnessed the sacred foundation. Religion, authority, and tradition thus became inseparable from one another, expressing the sacred binding force of an authoritative beginning to which one remained bound through the strength of tradition. Wherever the *pax Romana* of the Roman Empire spread what ultimately emerged as Western civilization, this Roman trinity took root, together with the Roman notion of human community as a *societas,* the living-together of *socii,* men allied on the basis of good faith. But the full strength of the Roman spirit, or the strength of a foundation reliable enough for the erection of political communities, showed itself only after the downfall of the Roman Empire, when the new Christian Church became so profoundly Roman that it reinterpreted the resurrection of Christ as the cornerstone on which another permanent institution was to be founded. With the repetition of the foundation of Rome through the foundation of the Catholic Church, the great Roman political trinity of religion, tradition, and authority could be carried into the Christian era, where it resulted in a miracle of longevity for one single institution, which can only be compared with the miracle of the thousand-year history of Rome in antiquity.

The Christian Church, as a public institution that inherited the Roman political conception of religion, could overcome the strong anti-institutional tendency of the Christian creed that is so manifest in the New Testament. Summoned by Constantine even before the fall of Rome to win for the declining Empire the protection of "the most powerful God" and to rejuvenate the Roman religion, whose gods were no longer powerful enough, the Church already had a tradition of its own based on the life and deeds of Jesus as related in the Gospels. Its foundation stone became, and has remained ever since, not mere Christian faith or Jewish obedience to divine law, but rather the given testimony of

the *autores* from which it derives its own authority as long as it hands it down *(tradere)* as tradition from generation to generation. Because the Church, in its role as the new protector of the Roman Empire, had kept intact the essentially Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition, it could eventually become Rome's heir and offer men "in membership of the Christian Church the sense of citizenship which neither Rome nor municipality could any longer offer them" (R. H. Barrow, *The Romans* [1949], p. 194). That the Roman formula could survive intact into the Christian Middle Ages, simply by exchanging the foundation of the Catholic Church for the foundation of Rome, is perhaps the greatest triumph of the Roman spirit. The break in this tradition through the Reformation was not final, since it challenged only the authority of the Catholic Church but not the trinity of religion, authority, and tradition itself. The break resulted in several "churches" instead of one Catholic Church, but it did not and never intended to abolish a religion that rests on the authority of those who witnessed its foundation as a unique historical event and whose testimony is kept alive by tradition. Since then, however, the breakdown of any of the three—religion, authority, or tradition—inevitably has carried with it the downfall of the other two. Without the sanction of religious belief, neither authority nor tradition is secure. Without the support of traditional tools of understanding and judgment, both religion and authority are bound to falter. And it is an error of the authoritarian trend in political thought to believe that authority can survive the decline of institutional religion and the break in the continuity of tradition. All three were doomed when, with the beginning of the modern age, the old belief in the sacredness of foundation in a far-distant past gave way to the new belief in progress and in the future as an unending progress whose unlimited possibilities

could not only never be bound to any past foundation, but which also could only be arrested and frustrated in their limitless potentiality by any new foundation.

The transformation of action into ruling and being ruled—that is, into those who command and those who execute commands—mentioned earlier, is the unavoidable result when the model for understanding action is taken from the private realm of household life and transposed to the public-political realm where action, properly speaking, as an activity that goes on only between *persons,** takes place. To consider action as an execution of orders and therefore to distinguish, in the political realm, between those who *know* and those who *do* has remained inherent in the concept of rulership precisely because this concept found its way into political theory through the very special experiences of the philosopher long before it could be justified through general political experience. The desire to rule, before it coincided with political necessities in the decline and ruin of ancient political bodies, had been either the tyrannical will to dominate or the result of the philosopher's inability to fit his own way of life and his own concerns into the public-political realm where, to him no less than to all other Greeks, specifically human possibilities could show themselves in full adequacy. The concept of rule, as we find it in Plato and as it became authoritative for the tradition of political thought, has two distinct sources in private experience. One is the experience which Plato shared with other Greeks, according

*Cf. H. Arendt, "Prologue," *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 12–14, where "person" is derived from *per-sonare*, a voice "sounding through" a public mask. Here "persons" is used in the Roman sense to refer to bearers of civil rights and duties.—Ed.

to which rule was primarily rule over slaves and expressed itself in the master-servant relationship of command and obedience. The other was the "utopian" need of the philosopher to become the city's ruler, that is, to enforce in the city those "ideas" which can be perceived only in solitude. They cannot be imparted to the multitude in the conventional manner of persuasion, the specifically Greek way of winning prominence and predominance, because their revelation and perception are not communicable in speech at all, and least of all in the manner of speech that characterizes persuasion.

Thus, while the consequences of the experience of foundation had the profoundest influence, not only on our legal system, but primarily on the course of our religious and spiritual history, its political significance would have been lost if it were not for the eighteenth-century revolutions in France and America, which were not only enacted, as Marx said, in Roman clothes, but also actually revived the fundamental contribution of Rome to Western history. Whatever enthusiasm the very word "revolution" once kindled in the hearts of men derived from the pride and the feeling of awe for the greatness of foundation, whereas the reason the experience of foundation, despite the overwhelming influence of Rome on our concepts of tradition and authority, had hardly any influence on our tradition of political thought lies paradoxically in the Roman respect for foundation wherever it was found. Greek philosophy, though never quite accepted and sometimes, especially by Cicero, even vehemently opposed, nevertheless imposed its categories on political thought because the Romans recognized it as the only proper and therefore eternal foundation of philosophy, just as they demanded that the foundation of Rome be recognized by the whole world as the only proper and eternal political foundation of the world. It is an error to

believe that what we in Western civilization call tradition—and whose breakdown we have been watching and suffering during the rise of the modern age—is identical with the tradition-bound societies of so-called primitive peoples or with the timeless sameness of ancient Asian civilizations, though it is true that the breakdown of our tradition has carried and spread the downfall of traditional societies all over the globe. Without Rome's sanctification of foundation as a unique event, Greek civilization, including Greek philosophy, would never have become the foundation of a tradition, though it might have been preserved through the efforts of scholars in Alexandria in a nonbinding, nonobliging manner. Our tradition, properly speaking, begins with the Roman acceptance of Greek philosophy as the unquestionable, authoritative binding foundation of thought, which made it impossible for Rome to develop a philosophy, even a political philosophy, and therefore left its own specifically political experience without adequate interpretation.

Though it is not our direct concern, we may mention in passing that the consequences of the Roman notion of tradition were not less fateful for the history of philosophy than they were for the history of political thought. As distinguished from politics, where the trinity of tradition, authority, and religion has an authentic basis in the experience of the foundation and preservation of the *civitas,* philosophy is, so to speak, antitraditional by nature. It was thus understood by Plato himself, if we trust his own statement, that the origin of philosophy lies in *thaumadzein,* to marvel and be struck by wonder, to endure, which is the business of the philosopher (*mala gar philosophou touto to pathos, to thaumadzein; ou gar allē archē philosophias hē hautē* [*Theaetetus,* 155d]), a statement which later was cited almost verbatim by Aristotle but given a different interpretation (*Metaphysics,* i, 982b9). Plato, to be sure,

when he remarked that the origin of philosophy is the *pathos* of wonder at everything that is, was not aware that tradition, whose chief function it is to give answers to all questions by channeling them into predetermined categories, could ever threaten the very existence of philosophy. But this threat is implicit in the modern philosophers Leibniz and Schelling, and explicit in Heidegger, when they declare that the origin of philosophy resides in the unanswerable question: Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing? Plato's violent treatment of Homer, who at the time had been considered the "educator of all Hellas" for centuries, is for us still the most magnificent sign of a culture aware of its past without any sense of the binding authority of tradition. Anything even remotely resembling this is quite inconceivable in Roman literature. But what would have happened to philosophy if the Roman sense for tradition had not constantly been checked by Greek philosophy may be seen in a remark made by Cicero in one of his so-called philosophical works, where he exclaims—in a context which is of no relevance—"Is it not a disgrace for philosophers to doubt what not even peasants would find doubtful?" (*De officiis*, iii, 77), as though it had not always been the unwelcome business of the philosopher to doubt what each of us takes for granted in everyday life, and as though anything could be worthwhile doubting or reflecting on philosophically which does not, in Kant's words, belong to the plausibilities *(Selbstverständlichkeiten)* of life and the world. Philosophy, wherever and whenever it reached true greatness, had to break even its own tradition, but the same cannot be said of political thought, with the result that political philosophy became more tradition-bound than any other branch of Western metaphysics.

Nowhere perhaps is the defectiveness of our tradition with regard to the range of actual political experiences of Western

mankind more manifest than in the silent abandonment by scholasticism of the central political experiences in early Christianity. Since Augustine became a neo-Platonist and Thomas Aquinas a neo-Aristotelian, their political philosophies would extract from the gospels only those features which corresponded, as *civitas terrena* and *civitas Dei*, to the Platonic dichotomy between life lived in the "cave" of human affairs and life lived in the glaring light of the truth of the "ideas"; or between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, derived from the Aristotelian hierarchy in which the *bios politikos* is inferior to the *bios theōrētikos* because only *theōrein*, that is, the "seeing" that leads to knowledge, has a dignity of its own, whereas action is always for the sake of something else. By this I do not mean to deny that these dichotomies received an altogether different meaning in Christian philosophy, or that the content of the *civitas Dei* and the *vita contemplativa* had little substantial resemblance to their predecessors in ancient philosophy. The point is rather that whatever experiences did not fit into these dichotomies, as outlined in Plato and Aristotle's political philosophies, simply did not enter the field of political theory at all but remained tied to a religious sphere where they gradually lost all significance for action until, after the rise of secularism, they ended in pious banalities.

This was notably the case with the daring and unique conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth drew from the one perplexity of human action which has equally plagued ancient political and modern historical considerations. The uncertainty of human action, in the sense that we never quite know what we are doing when we begin to act into the web of interrelationships and mutual dependencies that constitute the field of action, was considered by ancient philosophy to be the one supreme argument against the seriousness of human affairs. Later, this uncertainty

gave rise to all the well-known proverbial statements that acting men move in a network of errors and unavoidable guilt. Already medieval philosophy, and even more so Christian philosophy in the modern age, saw the finger of providence in the fact that, in the words of Bossuet, there is "no human power which does not, against its own will, further other plans than its own" (*Discours sur l'histoire universelle,* iii, 8), while with Kant and Hegel a secret force working behind man's back, the "ruse of nature" or "the cunning of reason," was needed as a deus ex machina to explain that history, which is made by men who never know what they are doing and always arrive at letting loose, as it were, something different from what they intended and wanted to happen, can still make sense, still constitute a story that conveys meaning. Against this traditional occupation with a "higher power," to which those who act know they are subject, and compared with which human deeds appear to be only the toying movements of a god holding the strings of puppets (Plato, *Laws,* vii, 803) or the planning movements of divine providence, stands the immediate political interest in finding a remedy, in the nature of human action itself, to guard the living-together of men against its basic uncertainty and unavoidable errors and guilt. Jesus found this remedy in the human capacity to forgive, which is likewise based on the insight that in action we never know what we are doing (Luke 23:34), so that, since we cannot stop acting as long as we live, we must never stop forgiving either (Luke 17:3–4). He even went so far as to deny explicitly that forgiving is the sole prerogative of God (Luke 5:21–24) and dared to think that God's mercy for the sins of men may ultimately depend upon man's willingness to forgive the trespasses of others (Matthew 6:14–15).

The great boldness and unique pride of this concept of forgiveness as a basic relationship between humans does not lie in the

seeming reversal of the calamity of guilt and error into the possible virtues of magnanimity or solidarity. It is rather that forgiving attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and that it succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to have become no longer possible. That men do not know what they are doing with respect to others, that they may intend good and achieve evil, and vice versa, and that nevertheless they aspire in action to the same fulfillment of intention that is the sign of mastership in their intercourse with natural, material things, has been the one great topic of tragedy since Greek antiquity. The tradition never lost sight of this tragic element in all action, nor failed to understand, though usually in a nonpolitical context, that forgiving is among the greatest of human virtues. It was only with the sudden and disconcerting onrush of the gigantic technical developments after the industrial revolution that the experience of fabrication achieved such an overwhelming predominance that the uncertainties of action could be forgotten altogether; talk could then begin about "making the future" and "building and improving society" as though one were talking about making chairs and building and improving houses.

What was lost by the tradition of political thought, and survived only in the religious tradition where it was valid for *homines religiosi,* was the relationship between doing and forgiving as a constitutive element of the intercourse between acting men, which was the specifically political, as distinguished from the religious, novelty in Jesus' teachings. (The only political expression forgiveness found is the purely negative right to pardon, the prerogative of the heads of state in all civilized countries.) Action, which is primarily the beginning of something new, possesses the self-defeating quality of causing the formation of a chain of

unpredictable consequences that tend to bind the actor forever. Each one of us knows that he is both actor and victim in this chain of consequences, which the ancients called "fate," the Christians called "providence," and we moderns arrogantly have degraded into mere chance. Forgiving is the only strictly human action that releases us and others from the chain and pattern of consequences that all action engenders; as such, forgiving is an action that guarantees the continuity of the capacity for action, for beginning anew, in every single human being who, without forgiving and being forgiven, would resemble the man in the fairy tale who is granted one wish and then forever punished with that wish's fulfillment.

Our understanding of tradition and authority has its origin in the political act of foundation, which, as previously noted, survived only in the great revolutions of the eighteenth century. The few philosophical definitions of man that take into account not only, after the Aristotelian model, men living together in mutual interdependence, but also man as an acting being, occur out of the context of political philosophy, even when their authors happen to have dealt specifically with politics. This is notably the case with Augustine's great saying: *Initium ut esset homo creatus est ante quem nemo fuit*, "That a beginning be made, man was created before whom nobody was," which would tie action, the capacity for beginning, to the fact that every human being is already by nature a new beginning that never before had appeared and been seen in the world. But this concept of man as a beginning remained without any consequences for Augustine's political philosophy or his understanding of the *civitas terrena*. And Kant never thought that his conception of mental activity as spontaneity, by which he meant both the capacity to start a new line of

thought and the ability to form synthetic judgments—judgments, namely, that are not deduced from either given facts or imposed rules—could possibly have any bearing on his political philosophy, which he, like Augustine, outlined as though this other thought had never occurred to him. This sort of incompatibility is perhaps most striking in Nietzsche, who in discussing the will to power once defined man as "the animal that can make promises," without ever becoming aware that this definition contains more of a true "revaluation of all values" than almost any other positive component of his philosophy.*

There are, of course, reasons why the tradition of political thought, from its beginning, lost sight of man as an acting being. The two prevailing philosophical definitions of man as *animal rationale* and as *homo faber* are characterized by this omission. In both of them man is seen as though he existed in the singular, for we can conceive of reason as well as of fabrication under the condition of the oneness of mankind. The tradition of political thought's concern with human plurality is as if it indicated no more than the sum total of reasonable beings, who, because of some decisive defect, are forced to live together and form a political body. But the three political experiences that lie outside the tradition, the experience of action as starting a new enterprise in pre-polis Greece, the experience of foundation in Rome, and the Christian experience of acting and forgiving as linked, that is, the knowledge that whoever acts must be ready to forgive and that whoever forgives actually acts, have a special significance because they remained relevant for our history even though they were bypassed by political thought. In a fundamental way they all con-

*The Genealogy of Morals, II, 1–2. Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 245 and n. 83.—Ed.

cern the one trait of the human condition without which politics would be neither posssible nor necessary: the fact of the plurality of men as distinguished from the oneness of God, whether the latter is undersood as a philosophical "idea" or as the personal God of monotheistic religions.

The plurality of men, indicated in the words of Genesis, which tell us not that God created man but "male and female created He *them*," constitutes the political realm. It does so, first, in the sense that no human being ever *exists* in the singular, which gives action and speech their specifically political significance, since they are the only activities which not only are affected by the fact of plurality, as are all human activities, but are altogether unimaginable apart from it. It is possible to conceive of a human world in the sense of a man-made artifice erected on the earth under the condition of the oneness of man, and Plato indeed deplores the fact that there are many men rather than one man living on the earth. He deplores the fact that certain "things are by nature private, such as eyes, and ears, and hands," because they prevent the many from being incorporated into a political body where all would live and behave as "one" (*Laws*, v, 739). Plato conceived this "one" in the speechless and actionless end of thought, which is the perception of truth as the supreme possibility of measuring up, so to speak, to the oneness of the "idea" or God. But an acting and speaking being existing in the singular cannot possibly be conceived. Second, the human condition of plurality is neither the plurality of objects fabricated in accordance with one model (or *eidos*, as Plato would say), nor the plurality of variations within a species. Just as there exists no human being as such, but only men and women who in their absolute distinctness are the same, that is, *human*, so this shared human sameness is the *equality* that in turn manifests itself only

in the absolute distinction of one equal from another. This is the case to such an extent that the phenomenon of identical-appearing twins always causes us a certain surprise. If, therefore, action and speech are the two outstanding political activities, distinctness and equality are the two constituent elements of bodies politic.

MONTESQUIEU'S REVISION OF THE TRADITION

In his *L'Esprit des lois*, Montesquieu reduces the forms of government to three—monarchy, republic, and tyranny—and immediately introduces an altogether new distinction: *"Il y a cette différence entre la nature du gouvernement et son principe que sa nature est ce qui le fait être tel, et son principe ce qui le fait agir"* (III, 1), which is to say, the nature of government makes it what it is, and its principle makes it act and move. Montesquieu explains that by "nature" he means the "particular structure of government," whereas the "principle," as we shall see at once, is what inspirits it. In describing the nature, essence, or particular structure of government, Montesquieu has nothing new to say, but he observes that this structure taken in itself would be altogether incapable of action or movement.* The concrete actions of each

*Arendt is of course aware, as she makes clear elsewhere in these same manuscripts, that Montesquieu's "fame rests securely on the discovery of the three branches of government, the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary, that is, on the great discovery that power is *not* indivisible [and that it] is completely separated from all connotations of violence." Her point, however, is that the "three branches of government represent for Montesquieu the three main political activities of men: the making of laws, the executing of decisions, and the judgments that accompany both." Power's "origins lie in the multi-

government and of the citizens living under the various forms of government cannot be explained in accordance with the two conceptual pillars of traditional definitions of power as the distinction between ruling and being ruled, and of law as the limitation of such power.

The reason for this curious immobility, which, as far as I know, Montesquieu was the first to discover, is that the terms "nature" or "essence" of government, taken in their original Platonic sense, indicate permanence by definition, a permanence that became even more permanent, so to speak, when Plato looked for the best of all governments. He thought it a matter of course that the best form of government would also be the most unchangeable and unmovable through the ever-changing circumstances of men. The supreme proof that tyranny is the worst form of government is still, for Montesquieu, that it is liable to destruction from within—to decline through its nature—whereas the other forms of government are chiefly destroyed through external circumstances. It is only in the *Laws,* but neither in the *Republic* nor the *Statesman*, that Plato thought lawfulness by itself, the laws of the city, could be devised in such a way that they would prevent any possible perversion of government, which was the only change that he took into account. But lawfulness, as Montesquieu understood it, can only set limitations to actions, and never inspires them. The greatness of the laws of a free society is that they never tell us what we should do, but tell us only what we must not do. In other words, Montesquieu, precisely because he took the lawfulness of governments as his starting point, saw that there must be more to governments than law and power to explain the actual

ple capacities of men for action, and these actions have no end as long as the body politic is alive."—Ed.

and constant actions of the citizens living within walls of law, as well as the performances of bodies politic themselves, whose "spirit" so obviously differs from one to another.

Montesquieu, accordingly, introduced three principles of action: virtue that inspires the actions in a republic; honor that inspires those in a monarchy; and fear that guides all actions in a tyranny, namely, the subjects' fear of the tyrant and one another, as well as the tyrant's fear of his subjects. Just as it is the pride of the subject of a monarchy to distinguish himself and receive public *honor,* so it is the pride of the citizen of a republic not to be more conspicuous in public matters than his fellow citizens, which is his *virtue*. These principles of action should not be mistaken for psychological motives. They are much rather the guiding criteria by which all actions in the public realm are judged beyond the merely negative yardstick of lawfulness, and which inspire the actions of both rulers and ruled. That virtue is the principle of action in a republic does not mean that the subjects of a monarchy do not know what virtue is, or that the citizens of a republic do not know what honor is. It means that the public-political realm is inspirited by one or the other, so that honor in a republic, or virtue in a monarchy, becomes more or less a private affair. It further means that if these principles are no longer valid, if they lose their authority so that virtue in a republic or honor in a monarchy is no longer believed in, or if, in a tyranny, the tyrant ceases to fear his subjects or the subjects cease to fear themselves and their oppressor, then each form of government comes to its end.

Beneath Montesquieu's unsystematic and sometimes even casual observations about the relationship between the nature of governments and their principles of action lies a deep insight into the unity of historical civilizations. His *esprit général,* uniting the structure of government with its corresponding principle of

action, became in the nineteenth century the idea behind the historical sciences as well as the philosophy of history. Herder's *Volksgeist*, or spirit of a people, like Hegel's "world spirit," or *Weltgeist*, shows clear traces of this ancestry. But Montesquieu's original discovery of the principles of action is less metaphysical and more fruitful for the study of politics. From it arises the question of what the origins of virtue and honor are, and in answering this question, Montesquieu unwittingly solves the problem of why so few forms of government were deemed sufficient over such a long history filled with so many radical changes.

Virtue, Montesquieu says, springs from the love of equality, and honor from the love of distinction, that is from "loving" one or the other of the two fundamental and interconnected traits of the human condition of plurality. Unfortunately, Montesquieu does not tell us from what aspect of the human condition fear, the inspiring principle of action in tyrannies, arises. In any case, this "love," or, as we shall say, the fundamental experience from which the principles of action spring, is for Montesquieu the binding link between the structure of a government represented in the spirit of its laws and the actions of its body politic. The fundamental experience of equality finds an adequate political expression in republican laws, while love for it, called virtue, inspires actions within republics. The fundamental experience of monarchies, and also of aristocracies and other hierarchical forms of government, is that by birth we are different from each other and therefore strive to distinguish ourselves, to manifest our natural or social distinctness; honor is the distinction by which a monarchy publicly recognizes the distinctness of its subjects. In both cases we are confronted with what we are by birth: that we are born equal in absolute difference and distinction from each other.

Republican equality is not the same as the equality of all men

before God or the equal fate of all men before death (neither of which has an immediate relationship to, or relevance for, the political realm). Citizenship once was based on equality under conditions of slavery and the ancient conviction that not all men are equally human. Conversely, for many centuries Christian churches remained indifferent to the question of slavery while clinging fast to the doctrine of the equality of all men before God. Politically, to be born equal means equality in strength independent of all other differences. Hobbes, therefore, could define equality as an equal ability to kill, and a similar conception is inherent in Montesquieu's notion of a state of nature that he defines as "fear of all," in opposition to Hobbes' idea of an originary "war of all against all." The experience upon which the body politic of a republic rests is the being-together of those who are equal in strength, and its virtue, which rules its public life, is the joy not to be alone in the world. To be alone means to be without equals: "One is one and all alone and evermore shall be," as a medieval nursery rhyme dared to indicate what humanly can be conceived as the tragedy of *one* God. Only insofar as I am among equals am I not alone, and in this sense the love of equality that Montesquieu calls virtue is also gratitude for being human and not like God.

Monarchic or aristocratic distinction is also possible only because of equality, without which distinctions could not even be measured. But the fundamental experience on which it rests is the experience of the uniqueness of every human being, which in the political realm can only show itself by measuring itself against others. When honor is its principle of action, then the inspiring guidance of a body politic's activities is to provide for every subject the possibility of coming into his own, of becoming a unique individual who never was before and never will be again, and win-

ning recognition as such within his walk of life. It is the specific advantage of monarchical governments that individuals are never confronted with an indistinct and undistinguishable mass of "all others," against which an individual can summon up nothing but a desperate minority of one. It is the specific danger of governments based on equality that the structure of lawfulness, within whose framework the equality of power receives its meaning, direction, and restriction, can become exhausted.

Whether the body politic rests on the experience of equality or of distinction, in either case living and acting together appears as the only human possibility in which strength, given by nature, can develop into power. It is thus that men, who despite their strength remain essentially powerless in isolation, unable even to develop their strength, establish the one realm of existence in which they themselves, and neither nature, God, nor death, can be powerful. The reason why Montesquieu neglected to give us the fundamental experience from which the fear of tyrannical government arises is that he, like the whole tradition, did not think tyranny was an authentic body politic at all. For fear as a principle of public-political action has a close connection with the fundamental experience of powerlessness that we all know from situations in which, for whatever reasons, we are unable to act. The reason why this experience is fundamental—and in this sense tyranny belongs to the elementary forms of government—is that all human actions, and by the same token all possibilities of human power, have limits. Politically speaking, fear (and I am not talking about anxiety) is despair over my impotence when I have reached the limits within which action is possible. Sooner or later every human life experiences these limits.

Therefore fear, properly speaking, is not a principle of action, but an antipolitical principle within the common world. The fear

of tyrannies which, according to traditional theory, comes either from a perverted democracy when the laws, which are intended to limit the strength of those considered equals, are broken down to such an extent that the strength of one cancels the strength of the other; or is due to the usurpation of the means of violence by a tyrant who then razes the boundaries of the laws. Lawlessness means in either case not only that power, generated by men acting together, is no longer possible, but also that impotence can be artificially created. Out of this general powerlessness, fear arises, and from this fear come both the will of the tyrant to subdue all others and the preparation of his subjects to endure domination. If virtue is love of equality in sharing power, then fear is the will to power from impotence, the will to dominate or else be dominated. But this thirst for power born of fear can never be stilled, because fear and mutual mistrust make "acting in concert," in Burke's phrase, impossible, so that tyrannies, while they persist, grow increasingly less powerful. Tyrannies are doomed because they destroy the togetherness of men: by isolating men from one another they seek to destroy human plurality. They are based on the one fundamental experience in which I am altogether alone, which is to be helpless (as Epictetus once defined loneliness), unable to enlist the help of my fellow men.

FROM HEGEL TO MARX

I

There is only one essential difference between Hegel and Marx, though, to be sure, one of catastrophic importance, and that is that Hegel projected his world-historical view only onto the past and let its completion fade away in the present, whereas Marx "prophetically" projected it the other way around onto the future and understood the present only as a springboard. However outrageous Hegel's satisfaction with current actual circumstances might have appeared, he was correct in his *political* instinct to restrict his method to what was comprehensible in purely contemplative terms, and not to use it for setting goals for the political will or for making seeming improvements in the future. But insofar as Hegel necessarily had to understand the present as the end of history, he had, in political terms, already discredited and contradicted his world-historical view, when Marx then used it in order to help him introduce the real and deadly antipolitical principle into politics. . . .*

Marx's objection to Hegel says: The dialectic of the world spirit does not move cunningly behind men's backs, using acts of the

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will that appear to originate with men for its own ends, but is instead the style and method of human action. As long as the world spirit was "unconscious," that is, as long as the laws of the dialectic remained undiscovered, action presented itself as an event in which the "absolute" revealed itself. Once we abandon our prejudice that some "absolute" reveals itself through us behind our backs *and* once we know the laws of the dialectic, we can realize the absolute.*

II

The works of Marx and Hegel stand together at the end of the great tradition of Western philosophy, but they also stand both in odd contradiction and in odd correspondence to one another. Marx described his departure from Hegel—and Hegel was for him the embodiment of all previous philosophy—as an inversion, as turning everything on its head, just as Nietzsche defined his "revaluation of values" as a reversal of Platonism. The striking thing about these self-interpretations is that inversion and reversal can occur only within a set of givens that must first be accepted as such. The "revaluation of values" turns the Platonic *hierarchy* of values upside down, but never steps outside the confines of those values. Something similar happens when, in adopting the Hegelian dialectic, Marx has the historical process begin with matter instead of with the mind. A quick comparison of the central presentations of history by both Marx and Hegel suffices for us to recognize that in both cases the concept of history is fundamentally similar.

**Denktagebuch*, September 1951.

Reversal and inversion, however, carry their own extraordinary significance. They imply that the traditional hierarchy of values, if not necessarily their content, is established arbitrarily, or willfully, as Nietzsche would put it. The end of the tradition, it appears, begins with the collapse of the tradition's authority, not with any challenge to its substantial content as such. With his unrivaled succinctness Nietzsche called the result of this collapse of authority "perspectival thinking," that is, thinking capable of moving about willfully (which is to say, dictated only by individual will) within the context of the tradition—and in such a way that everything previously considered true now assumes the aspect of a perspective, over against which there must be the possibility of a multitude of equally legitimate and equally fruitful perspectives.

And it is this perspectival thinking that Marxism has in fact introduced into all fields of humanistic study. What we call Marxism in a specifically political sense scarcely does justice to Marx's extraordinary influence on the humanities. That influence has nothing to do with the method of vulgar Marxism—never employed by Marx himself—which explains all political and cultural phenomena from the material circumstances of the production process. What was new and extraordinarily effective about Marx's view was the way in which he regarded culture, politics, society, and economics within *one* functional context, which, as it soon turned out, can be arbitrarily shifted from one perspective to another. Max Weber's study of how capitalism arose out of the mentality of the Protestant ethic owes as much to Marxist historiography—and makes more productive use of its results—as does any strictly materialistic historical research. No matter what point of departure historical-perspectival thinking chooses—be it the so-called history of ideas, or political history,

or the social sciences and economics—the result is a system of relationships which is derived from each such shift in perspective and from which, to put it in crude terms, everything can be explained without ever generating a binding truth analogous to the authority of tradition.

What has occurred in modern thought, via Marx on the one hand and Nietzsche on the other, is the adoption of the framework of tradition with a concurrent rejection of its authority. This is the real historical significance of the inversion of Hegel in Marx and the reversal of Plato in Nietzsche. All operations of this sort, however, in which thinking proceeds within traditional concepts while "merely" rejecting tradition's substantial authority, contain the same devastating contradiction that inevitably lies in all the many discussions of the secularization of religious ideas. Tradition, authority, and religion are concepts whose origins lie in pre-Christian and Christian Rome; they belong together just as do "war and trade and piracy, that indivisible trinity" (Goethe, *Faust*, ii, 11187–88). The past, to the extent that it is passed on as tradition, has authority; authority, to the extent that it presents itself as history, becomes tradition; and if authority does not proclaim, in the spirit of Plato, that "God [and not man] is the measure of all things," it is arbitrary tyranny rather than authority. Acceptance of tradition without religiously based authority is always nonbinding because anything accepted on such conditions has forfeited both its true content and its manifest claim upon men in the form of authority. It is quite in keeping with such formalization—which is no less a part of conservative thought than it is of thought in open rebellion against the authority of tradition—that Marx could claim that it was from the tradition (which for him had come to its conclusion in Hegel) that he had taken the dialectical method. In other words, what he took from

the tradition was an apparently purely formal component to be used in whatever way he chose.

There is obviously no need to discuss the contention that methods make no difference, for the way we approach any subject defines not only the *how* of our inquiry but also the *what* of our findings. Of more importance here is the fact that dialectic could only first develop as a method once Marx had deprived it of its actual substantial content. Nowhere has the acceptance of tradition with a concomitant loss of its substantial authority proved more costly than in Marx's adoption of the Hegelian dialectic. By turning dialectic into a method, Marx liberated it from those contents that had held it within limits and bound it to substantial reality. And in doing so, he made possible the kind of process-thinking so characteristic of nineteenth-century ideologies, ending in the devastating logic of those totalitarian regimes whose apparatus of violence is subject to no constraints of reality.

The formal methodology that Marx adopted from Hegel is the familiar three-step process in which thesis leads by way of antithesis to synthesis, whereby synthesis, for its part, then becomes the first step in the next triad, that is, itself becomes a new thesis, from which then, automatically, as it were, antithesis and synthesis arise in a never-ending process. What is of importance here is that this thinking can take off, so to speak, from one single point, that a process that can essentially no longer be halted begins with that first proposition, that first thesis. This thinking, in which all reality is reduced to stages of a single gigantic developmental process—something still quite unknown to Hegel—opens a path onto truly ideological thinking, which, in turn, was also something still unknown to Marx. This step from dialectic as method to dialectic as ideology is completed once the first proposition of the dialectical process becomes a premise in logic from

which everything else can be deduced with a consequentiality totally independent of all experience. Hegelian philosophy presents the absolute—that is, the world spirit or the godhead—in its dialectical movement, which is how it reveals itself to human consciousness. In totalitarian ideologies, logic seizes upon certain "ideas" and perverts them into premises. In between these two stands dialectical materialism, in which experientially verifiable factors, that is, the material conditions of production, develop dialectically out of themselves. Marx formalizes Hegel's dialectic of the absolute in history as a *development*, as a self-propelled process, and in this connection it is important to recall that both Marx and Engels were adherents of Darwin's theory of evolution. This formalization robs tradition of the substance of its authority even while it remains within the framework of tradition. In fact there is only one step left for the Marxist concept of development to become ideological process-thinking—the step that ultimately leads to totalitarian coercive deduction based on a single premise. It is here that the thread of tradition is first truly broken, and this break is an event that can never be "explained" by intellectual trends or demonstrable influences from the history of ideas. If we regard this break from the perspective of the path that leads from Hegel to Marx, we can say that it occurred at the moment when not the idea, but logic unleashed from the idea, seized the masses.

Marx himself explained the essence of his relation to and departure from Hegel in a statement taken from the so-called eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. "Philosophers have merely *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." Within the context of his entire work and overarching purpose, this 1845 remark by the young Marx might be reformulated as follows: Hegel interpreted the past as history and in doing so discovered

dialectics as the fundamental law of all historical change. This discovery enables us to shape the future as history. For Marx, revolutionary politics is action that makes history coincide with the fundamental law of all historical change. This renders superfluous Hegel's "cunning of reason" (Kant's term was the "ruse of nature"), the role of which had been to confer on political action a retrospective political rationale, that is, to make it comprehensible. Hegel and Kant had to fall back on this strangely subtle behavior of Providence because on the one hand, along with the tradition, they assumed that political action as such has less to do with truth than any other human activity, and because on the other they were faced with the modern problem of a history that—despite men's contradictory actions, which on the whole always result in something other than what each individual intends—is uniformly comprehensible, and thus apparently "rational." Because men never have reliable control over the actions they have begun and can never fully realize their original intentions, history stands in need of "cunning," which differs from any sort of "trickiness" and, according to Hegel, consists of "the great device that forces others to be what they are in and for themselves" (*Jenenser Realphilosophie*, Meiner edition, vol. xx, p. 199). While still considering himself very much within the thrust of Hegelian philosophy, Marx rejects the idea that action in and of itself, and absent the cunning of Providence, cannot reveal truth, or indeed produce it. He thereby breaks with all traditional evaluations within political philosophy, according to which thinking ranks higher than action, and politics exists solely to make possible and safeguard the *bios theōrētikos*—the contemplative life of philosophers or the contemplation of God by Christians removed from the world.

But this break by Marx with tradition likewise takes place

within the framework of tradition. What Marx never doubted was the relationship between thinking and acting as such. The Feuerbach thesis clearly states that only because and after the philosophers had interpreted the world could there come a time to change it. That is also why Marx could allow his revolutionary politics, or rather his revolutionizing view of politics, to end in the image of a "classless society"—an image strikingly oriented around the ideals of leisure and free time as realized in the Greek polis. The upshot, however, was of course not this fleeting glance back to a past utopia, but rather the revaluation of politics as such.

With the anticipated disappearance of rule and domination in Marx's classless society, "freedom" becomes a meaningless word unless it is conceived in an altogether new sense. Since Marx, here as elsewhere, did not bother to redefine his terms but remained in the conceptual framework of the tradition, Lenin was not so wrong when he concluded that if nobody can be free who rules over others, then freedom is a prejudice or an ideology—although he thereby robbed Marx's work of one of its most important impulses. Adherence to tradition is also the reason for the even more fateful error of Marx as well as Lenin—that mere administration, in contrast to government, is the adequate form of men living together under the condition of radical and universal equality. Administration was supposed to be no-rule, but it actually can only be rule by nobody, that is, bureaucracy, a form of government in which nobody takes responsibility. Bureaucracy is a form of government from which the personal element of rulership has disappeared, and it is also true that such a government may rule in the interest of no class. But this no-man-rule, the fact that in an authentic bureaucracy nobody occupies the empty chair of the ruler, does not mean that the conditions of rule have disappeared. This nobody rules very effectively when looked upon

from the side of the ruled, and, what is worse, has one important trait in common with the tyrant.

Tyrannical power is defined by tradition as arbitrary power, and this originally signified a rule for which no account need be given, a rule that owes no one any responsibility. The same is true for the bureaucratic rule by nobody, though for an altogether different reason. There are many people in a bureaucracy who may demand an account, but there is nobody to give it, because "nobody" cannot be held responsible. In the stead of the tyrant's arbitrary decisions, we find haphazard settlements of universal procedures, settlements which are without either malice or arbitrariness because there is no will behind them, but to which there is also no appeal. As far as the ruled are concerned, the net of the patterns in which they are caught is by far more dangerous and more deadly than mere arbitrary tyranny. But bureaucracy should not be mistaken for totalitarian domination. If the October Revolution had been permitted to follow the lines prescribed by Marx and Lenin, which was not the case, it would probably have resulted in bureaucratic rule. The rule of nobody—not anarchy, or disappearance of rule, or oppression—is the ever-present danger of any society based on universal equality. The concept of universal equality within the tradition of political thought means nothing other than that no man is free.

What replaces the "cunning of reason" in Marx is, as we know, interest in the sense of class interest. What makes history comprehensible is the clash of interests; what makes it meaningful is the assumption that the interest of the laboring class is identical with the interest of humankind, and for Marx that means with the interest, not of a majority of all men, but of the essential humanity of the human race. Positing interest as the motor of political action is nothing new. Rohan is famous for having stated

that kings rule nations, and interests rule kings. For Marx, this proposition was the simple result of both his economic studies and his dependence on Aristotelian philosophy. What is new, if not decisive, is his linking of interest, that is of something material, to the essential humanity of man. What *is* decisive is the further linking of interest not so much to the laboring class as to labor itself as the preeminent human activity.

Behind Marx's theory of interests stands the conviction that the only legitimate gratification of an interest lies in labor. Supporting this conviction and fundamental to all his writings is a new definition of man, which sees man's essential humanity not in his rationality *(animal rationale)*, or in his production of objects *(homo faber)*, or in his having been made in the likeness of God *(creatura Dei)*, but rather in labor, which tradition had unanimously rejected as incompatible with a full and free human existence. Marx was the first to define man as an *animal laborans*, as a laboring creature. He subsumes under this definition everything tradition passed down as the distinguishing marks of humanity: labor is the principle of rationality and its laws, which in the development of productive forces determine history, make history comprehensible to reason. Labor is the principle of productivity; it produces the truly human world on earth. And labor is, as Engels put it in his intentionally blasphemous epigram that simply reduces many of Marx's statements to a single formula, "the Creator of humankind."

We cannot pursue here what this new self-understanding of man as an *animal laborans* really says and implies. Let it suffice to suggest that on the one hand it corresponds precisely with the crucial sociological event of recent history, which, by first granting equal civil rights to the laboring class, then went on to define all human activity as labor and to interpret it as productivity. Classi-

cal economics never differentiated between simple labor, which produces for immediate consumption, and the production of objects in the sense of the *homo faber*. The crucial factor here is that in his theory of productive forces based on human labor, Marx resolved this confusion in favor of labor, thus attributing to labor a productivity it never possesses. But although such a glorification and misunderstanding of labor closed its eyes to the most elementary realities of human life, it corresponded perfectly with the needs of its day. This correspondence is of course the real reason for the extraordinary impact Marxism had in every part of the globe. When one considers the actual interrelationships of things, it is no wonder that, within the framework of the tradition in which Marx always worked, there could hardly be any other outcome than a new twist in deterministic philosophy, which in its old, familiar fashion "necessarily" sees freedom somehow emerging out of necessity. For Marx's glorification of labor removed none of the reasons advanced by the tradition in denying political equality and full human freedom to man as laborer. Neither Marx nor the introduction of machinery was able to undo the fact that man is forced to labor in order to live, that labor is therefore not a free and productive activity but is inextricably bound up with what compels us: the necessities that come with simply being alive. It was Marx's great achievement to have made labor the center of his theory, because labor was exactly what all political philosophy, once it no longer dared to justify slavery, had averted its gaze from. But for all that, we are still left without an answer to the political question posed by the necessity of labor in human life and by the paramount role it plays in the modern world.

THE END OF TRADITION

I

Unavoidably, first and foremost the tradition of political thought contains the philosophers' traditional attitude toward politics. Political thought itself is older than our tradition of philosophy, which begins with Plato and Aristotle, just as philosophy itself is older and contains more than the Western tradition eventually accepted and developed. At the beginning, therefore, not of our political or philosophical history but of our tradition of political philosophy stands Plato's contempt for politics, his conviction that "the affairs and actions of men *(ta tōn anthrōpōn pragmata)* are not worthy of great seriousness" and that the only reason why the philosopher needs to concern himself with them is the unfortunate fact that philosophy—or, as Aristotle somewhat later would say, a life devoted to it, the *bios theōrētikos*—is materially impossible without a halfway reasonable arrangement of all affairs that concern men insofar as they live together. At the beginning of the tradition, politics exists because men are alive and mortal, while philosophy concerns those matters which are eternal, like the universe. Insofar as the philosopher is also a mortal man, he too is concerned with politics. But this concern has only a negative relationship to his being a philosopher: he is

afraid, as Plato so abundantly made clear, that through bad management of political affairs he will not be able to pursue philosophy. *Scholē,* like the Latin *otium,* is not leisure as such but only leisure from political duty, nonparticipation in politics, and therefore the freedom of the mind for its concern with the eternal (the *aei on*), which is possible only if the needs and necessities of mortal life have been taken care of. Politics, therefore, seen from the specifically philosophical viewpoint, already in Plato begins to comprehend more than *politeuesthai,* more than those activities which are characteristic of the ancient Greek polis, for which the mere fulfillment of the needs and necessities of life was a prepolitical condition. Politics begins, as it were, to expand its realm downward to life's necessities themselves so that to the philosophers' scorn for the perishable affairs of mortals was added the specifically Greek contempt for everything that is necessary for mere life and survival. As Cicero, in his futile attempt to disavow Greek philosophy on this one point—its attitude to politics—ironically pointed out, if only "all that is essential to our wants and comforts were supplied by some magic wand, as in the legends, then every man of first-rate ability could drop all other responsibility and devote himself exclusively to knowledge and science."* In brief, when the philosophers began to concern themselves with politics in a systematic way, politics at once became for them a necessary evil.

Thus our tradition of political philosophy, unhappily and fatefully, and from its very beginning, has deprived political affairs, that is, those activities concerning the common public realm that comes into being wherever men live together, of all dignity of their own. In Aristotelian terms, politics is a means to an end; it

**De Officiis,* I, xliv.—Ed.

has no end in and by itself. More than that, the proper end of politics is in a way its opposite, namely, nonparticipation in political affairs, *scholē,* the condition of philosophy, or rather the condition of a life devoted to it. In other words, no other activity appears as antiphilosophical, as hostile to philosophy, as political activity in general and action in particular, with the exception, of course, of what was never deemed to be strictly human activity at all, such as mere laboring. Spinoza polishing lenses eventually could become the symbolic figure of the philosopher, just as innumerable examples taken from the experiences of work, craftsmanship, and the liberal arts since the time of Plato could serve to lead by analogy to the higher knowledge of philosophic truths. But since Socrates, no man of action, that is, nobody whose original experience was political, as for instance Cicero's was, could ever hope to be taken seriously by the philosophers, and no specifically political deeds or human greatness as expressed in action could ever hope to serve as examples in philosophy, in spite of the never forgotten glory of Homer's praise of the hero. Philosophy is even further removed from *praxis* than it is from *poiesis*.

Of perhaps even greater consequence for the degradation of politics is that in the light of philosophy—for which the origin and principle, the *archē,* are one and the same—politics does not even have an origin of its own: it came into being only because of the elementary and prepolitical fact of biological necessity, which makes men need each other in the arduous task of keeping alive. Politics, in other words, is derivative in a twofold sense: it has its origin in the prepolitical data of biological life, and it has its end in the postpolitical, highest possibility of human destiny. And since it is the curse of prepolitical necessities to require laboring, we may now say that politics is limited by labor from below and by philosophy from above. Both are excluded from politics strictly

speaking, the one as its lowly origin and the other as its exalted aim and end. Very much like the activity of the class of guardians in Plato's *Republic,* politics is supposed to watch and manage the livelihood and the base necessities of labor on the one hand, and to take its orders from the apolitical *theōria* of philosophy on the other. Plato's demand for a philosopher-king does not mean that philosophy itself should, or ever could, be realized in an ideal polity, but rather that rulers who value philosophy more than any other activity should be permitted to rule in such a way that there may be philosophy, that philosophers will have *scholē* and be undisturbed by those matters that arise from our living together, which, in turn, have their ultimate origin in the imperfections of human life.

Political philosophy never recovered from this blow dealt by philosophy to politics at the very beginning of our tradition. The contempt for politics, the conviction that political activity is a necessary evil, due partly to the necessities of life that force men to live as laborers or rule over slaves who provide for them, and partly to the evils that come from living together itself, that is, to the fact that the multitude, which the Greeks called *hoi polloi*, threatens the security and even the existence of every individual person, runs like a red thread throughout the centuries that separate Plato from the modern age. In this context it is irrelevant whether this attitude expresses itself in secular terms, as in Plato and Aristotle, or if it does so in the terms of Christianity. It was Tertullian who first held that, insofar as we are Christians, *nulla res nobis magis aliena quam res publica* ("to us nothing is more alien than public affairs") and nevertheless still insisted on the necessity of the *civitas terrena,* of secular government, because of man's sinfulness, and also because, as Luther was to put it much later, true Christians *wohnen fern voneinander,* that is, dwell far from

each other and are as forlorn amongst the multitude as were the ancient philosophers. What is important is that the same notion was taken up, again in secular terms, by post-Christian philosophy, as it were surviving all other changes and radical turnings about, expressing itself now in the melancholy reflection of James Madison, that government surely is nothing but a reflection on human nature, which would not be necessary if men were angels; now in the angry words of Nietzsche, that no government can be good about which the subjects have to worry at all. With respect to the evaluation of politics, though in no other, it is irrelevant whether the *civitas Dei* gives meaning and order to the *civitas terrena*, or whether the *bios theōrētikos* prescribes its rules and is the ultimate end of the *bios politikos*.

What matters, in addition to the inherent degradation of this whole realm of life through philosophy, is the radical separation of those matters that men can reach and attain only through living and acting together from those that are perceived and cared about by man in his singularity and solitude. And here again, it does not matter if man in his solitude searches for truth, finally attaining it in the speechless contemplation of the *idea* of ideas, or whether he cares for the salvation of his soul. What matters is the unbridgeable abyss that opened and has never been closed, not between the so-called individual and the so-called community (which is a late and phony way of stating an authentic ancient problem), but between being in solitude and living together. Compared with this perplexity, even the equally ancient and vexing problem of the relationship, or rather nonrelationship, between action and thought is secondary in importance. Neither the radical separation between politics and contemplation, between living together and living in solitude as two distinct modes of life, nor their hierarchical structure, was ever doubted after Plato had established

both. Here again the only exception is Cicero, who, out of his tremendous Roman political experience, doubted the validity of the superiority of the *bios theōrētikos* over the *bios politikos,* the validity of solitude over the *communitas.* Rightly but futilely, Cicero objected that he who was devoted to "knowledge and science" would flee his "solitude and ask for a companion in his study, be it in order to teach or to learn, to listen or to speak."* Here as elsewhere, the Romans paid a steep price for their contempt of philosophy, which they held to be "impractical." The end result was the undisputed victory of Greek philosophy and the loss of Roman experience for occidental political thought. Cicero, because he was not a philosopher, was unable to challenge philosophy.

The question of whether Marx, who at the end of the tradition challenged its formidable unanimity about the proper relationship between philosophy and politics, was a philosopher in the traditional sense, or even in any authentic sense, need not be decided. The two decisive statements that abruptly and, as it were, inarticulately sum up his thought on the matter—"The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world . . . the point, however, is to *change* it," and "You cannot supersede [*aufheben* in the Hegelian triple sense of conserve, raise to a higher level, and abolish] philosophy without realizing it"—are so intimately phrased in Hegel's terminology and thought along his lines that, taken by themselves, their explosive content notwithstanding, they can almost be regarded as an informal and natural continuation of Hegel's philosophy. For no one before Hegel could have conceived of philosophy as mere interpretation, of the world or anything else, or that philosophy could be realized except in the *bios theōrētikos,* the life of

**De Officiis,* I, xliv; cf. ibid. xliii.—Ed.

the philosopher himself. What is to be realized, moreover, is not any specific or new philosophy, not the philosophy, for instance, of Marx himself, but the highest destiny of man as traditional philosophy, culminating in Hegel, defined it.

II

In following Montesquieu, we saw that one of the conceptual pillars on which the definitions of our forms of government rest, the concept of rule, is questionable in the sense that it was introduced long before actual experiences in the political realm could have justified the central place it held from the beginning of our tradition. We have seen how these definitions transformed and deformed actual experiences, and we may suspect that they prescribed through their conceptual force the lines along which later experiences, which indeed were experiences of ruling and being ruled, were understood and handed down.

But if we now turn to the state theory of Marx, it is as though we were to consider the very opposite alternative in the definition of government. Not only does the concept of law recede into the background, as did the concept of rule in Montesquieu's description; it is altogether eliminated, because all positive legal systems, according to Marx, are ideologies, pretexts for the exercise of rule of one class over another. The same, however, does not happen to the state, even though the state frequently is also regarded by Marx only as an instrument of class rule and therefore as a secondary phenomenon. Class rule is directly realized in political government, and therefore the state retains a reality that by far outweighs the merely ideological function of laws. State power is the expression of class antagonism, and without this weight of actual physi-

cal power, expressed in the possession of the means of violence and represented for Marx chiefly by the army and the police, his claim for a dictatorship of the proletariat as the last stage of rule and oppression would make no sense. To Marx, the political realm has been completely dominated by the division between ruling and being ruled, between oppressing and being oppressed, which in turn is based on the division between exploiting and being exploited. The only law Marx knows as a positive, nonideological force is the law of history, whose role within the political realm, however, is primarily antilegal; it makes its force felt by exploding the legal systems, by abolishing the old order, and comes to the full light of day only when in wars and revolutions it "plays the role of midwife in [an] old society which is pregnant with the new" order.*

What is significant in our context is that this law can never be used in order to establish the public realm. The law of history—and the same is true for all nineteenth-century laws of development—is a law of movement and thereby in flagrant contradiction of all other concepts of law that we know from our tradition. Traditionally, laws are stabilizing factors in society, whereas here law indicates the predictable and scientifically observable movement of history as it develops. From this new concept of law, no code of legal prescriptions, which is to say no positive, posited laws, can ever be deduced, because it necessarily lacks stability and in itself is nothing but the indication and exponent of motion. Thus Marx likens the legislator to a "natural scientist who does not make or invent laws, but only formulates them." While it may still be possible, although not very accurate, to see in this law of the developing movement of history traces of

*_Capital_ (New York: Modern Library, 1959), 824.—Ed.

the old universal law, the Greek *nomos* that rules over all things, or the natural law that informs all legislation, it is obvious that the political function of laws has been abolished to a degree where—and this is decisive for Marx's political philosophy—not even new laws for the best government or the best society of the future are any longer envisaged. Lenin's solution of the resulting problem is characteristic: in *The State and Revolution*, he writes, "We . . . do not . . . deny the possibility . . . of excesses on the part of individual persons. . . . But no . . . special machine of . . . repression is needed for this; this will be done . . . as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilized people, even in modern society, parts two people who are fighting, or interferes to prevent a woman from being assaulted." When there is no more poverty, such excesses will inevitably "wither away." What matters to us here is not the somewhat naïve conviction that moral standards are a matter of course if people are only permitted to keep them, that these standards (as Lenin says in the same work) were discovered in their fundamental simplicity thousands of years ago and are self-evident, even though in a sense this naïveté separates Marx as well as Lenin from their successors, making both of them still very much figures of a nineteenth-century world in which we no longer live. What matters is that Marx's concept of law cannot be used under any conceivable circumstances for the purpose of establishing a body politic, or of guaranteeing the public realm its relative permanence when compared with the futility of human life and human deeds. On the contrary, permanence in Marx's state theory springs directly from the fact of rulership. This permanence is seen as an obstacle by which the force of development, which in its most elementary form is the development of man's productive capacities, is constantly arrested and hindered. Through rulership, the dominant class tries to prevent, and actu-

ally succeeds in delaying, the arrival and seizure of power by the new class that it oppresses and exploits. Permanence has become an obstacle, but insofar as it exists, it resides in rulership and not in law.

Insofar as Marx's concept of state has eliminated the element of law altogether, we cannot properly speak of Marxian forms of government. All traditional forms of rulership would be tyrannies, and Engels admits this implicitly when he says (in a letter to Bebel in 1875) that "it is pure nonsense to talk of a free people's state; so long as the proletariat still uses the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist." What Marx knows are four forms of rulership which in various interpretations and contexts appear from the early writings to his late works: history starts with rulership over slaves, which constituted the body politic of antiquity; it proceeds to the nobility's rule over serfs, which constituted the body politic of feudalism; it culminates in his own time in the rule of the bourgeoisie over the working class; and it will find its conclusion in the dictatorship of the proletariat, where the rule of the state will "wither away" because the rulers will find no new class to oppress or against which they must defend themselves.

The greatness of Marx's understanding of rule is that it enlightens one of the origins from which the notion of rulership first found its way into the definitions of sound bodies politic, which, taken in themselves, seemed to correspond to nothing less than to the division of citizens into rulers and ruled. Marx's four forms of rulership are only variations of the first, the ancient rule over slaves, in which he rightly saw a domination which underlies all ancient forms of government. The important point is that before the tradition, this domination was so little part and parcel

of the public realm that it constituted the private condition sine qua non for admittance to it. Aristotle distinguishes three classes (to use Marx's terminology) of men: those who labor for others and are slaves; those who labor for themselves in order to earn their livelihood and are not free citizens; and those who, because they possess slaves and labor neither for themselves nor for others, are admitted to the public realm. That the actual living experience of rulership was not located in the public realm but in the private sphere of the household, whose head ruled over his family and his slaves, is still manifest in the many examples of rulership which have been given since the beginning of our tradition, and which almost always are taken from this institution of private life. Already in Plato the implications for action of this image of the household are clearly indicated: "For the truly kingly science [of statesmanship] ought not itself to act *[prattein]* but rule *[archein]* over those who can and do act." It causes them to act, "for it perceives the beginning and principle *[archē]* of what is necessary for the polis, while the others do only what they are told to do" (*Statesman*, 305d). Here, the older relationship between *archein* and *prattein*, between beginning something and, together with others who are needed and enlist voluntarily, seeing it through to its end, is replaced by a relationship that is characteristic of the supervisory function of a master telling his servants how to accomplish and execute a given task. In other words, action becomes mere execution, which is determined by somebody who knows and therefore does not himself act.

In reinterpreting the tradition of political thought and bringing it to its end, it is crucial that Marx challenges not philosophy but its alleged impracticality. He challenges the resignation of philosophers who do no more than find a place for themselves in the world, instead of changing the world and making it, so to

speak, philosophical. And this is not only more than, but also decisively different from, Plato's ideal of philosophers who rule as kings, because it implies not the rule of philosophy over men, but that all men can become, as it were, philosophers. The consequence that Marx drew from Hegel's philosophy of history (and Hegel's whole philosophical work, including the *Logik*, has only one topic—namely, history) was that action or *praxis*, contrary to the whole tradition, was so far from being the opposite of thought that it was the true and real vehicle of thought, and that politics, far from being infinitely beneath the dignity of philosophy, was the only activity that was inherently philosophical.

INTRODUCTION *INTO* POLITICS

I

What Is Politics?

Politics is based on the fact of human plurality. God created *man*, but *men* are a human, earthly product, the product of human nature. Because philosophy and theology are always concerned with *man*, because all their pronouncements would be correct if there were only one or two men or only identical men, they have found no valid philosophical answer to the question: What is politics? Worse still, for all scientific thinking there is only *man*—in biology, or psychology, as in philosophy and theology, just as in zoology there is only *the* lion. Lions would be of concern only to lions.

What is remarkable among all great thinkers is the difference in rank between their political philosophies and the rest of their works—even in Plato. Their politics never reaches the same depth. This lack of depth is nothing but a failure to sense the depths in which politics is anchored.

Politics deals with the coexistence and association of *different* men. Men organize themselves politically according to certain essential commonalities found within or abstracted from an absolute chaos of differences. As long as political bodies are based

on the family and conceived in the image of the family, kinship in all its degrees is credited on the one hand as being able to unite extreme individual differences, *and,* on the other hand, as a means by which groups resembling individuals can be isolated and contrasted.

In this form of organization, any original differentiation is effectively eradicated, in the same way that the essential equality of all men, insofar as we are dealing with *man,* is destroyed. The downfall of politics in both directions has its origin in the way political bodies are developed out of the family. Here we have a hint of what becomes symbolic in the image of the Holy Family—namely that God created not just man but the family.

To the extent that we regard the family as more than participation, that is, the active participation of a plurality, we begin to play God, by acting as if we could naturally escape from the principle of human differentiation. Instead of engendering a human being, we try to create *man* in our own likeness.

But in practical, political terms, the family acquires its deep-rooted importance from the fact that the world is organized in such a way that there is no place within it for the individual, and that means for anyone who is different. Families are founded as shelters and mighty fortresses in an inhospitable, alien world, into which we want to introduce kinship. This desire leads to the fundamental perversion of politics, because it abolishes the basic quality of plurality, or rather forfeits it by introducing the concept of kinship.

Man, as philosophy and theology know him, exists—or is realized—in politics only in the equal rights that those who are most different guarantee for each other. This voluntary guarantee of, and concession to, a claim of legal equality recognizes the plurality of men, who can thank themselves for their plurality and the creator of *man* for their existence.

There are two good reasons why philosophy has never found a place where politics can take shape. The first is the assumption that there is something political *in* man that belongs to his essence. This simply is not so; *man* is apolitical. Politics arises *between men*, and so quite *outside* of *man*. There is therefore no real political substance. Politics arises in what lies *between men* and is established as relationships. Hobbes understood this.

The second is the monotheistic concept of God, in whose likeness man is said to have been created. On that basis, there can, of course, be only *man,* while *men* become a more or less successful repetition of the same. Man, created in the likeness of God's solitariness, lies at the basis of the Hobbesian "state of nature" as a "war of all against all." It is the war of rebellion of each against all the others, who are hated because they exist without meaning—without meaning for man created in the likeness of God's aloneness.

The West's solution for escaping from the impossibility of politics within the Western creation myth is to transform politics into history, or to substitute history for politics. In the idea of world history, the multiplicity of men is melted into *one* human individual, which is then also called humanity. This is the source of the monstrous and inhuman aspect of history, which first accomplishes its full and brutal end in politics.

It is so difficult to comprehend that there is a realm in which we can be truly free, that is, neither driven by ourselves nor dependent on the givens of material existence. Freedom exists only in the unique intermediary space of politics. We escape from this freedom into the "necessity" of history. A ghastly absurdity.

It could be that the task of politics is to establish a world as transparent for truth as God's creation is. In terms of the Judeo-Christian myth, that would mean *man,* created in the likeness of God, has received the procreative energy to organize *men* into the

likeness of divine creation. This is probably nonsense. But it would be the only possible demonstration of, and justification for, the concept of natural law.

God's creation of the plurality of *men* is embodied in the absolute difference of all men from one another, which is greater than the relative difference among peoples, nations, or races. But in that case, there is in fact no role for politics. From the very start, politics organizes those who are absolutely different with a view to their *relative* equality and in contradistinction to their *relative* differences.*

II

Prejudice Against Politics and What, in Fact, Politics Is Today

Any talk of politics in our time has to begin with those prejudices that all of us who aren't professional politicians have against politics. Our shared prejudices are themselves political in the broadest sense. They do not originate in the arrogance of the educated, are not the result of the cynicism of those who have seen too much and understood too little. Because prejudices crop up in our own thinking, we cannot ignore them, and since they refer to undeniable realities and faithfully reflect our current situation precisely in its political aspects, we cannot silence them with arguments. These prejudices, however, are not judgments. They indicate that we have stumbled into a situation in which we do not know, or do not yet know, how to function in just such political terms. The danger is that politics may vanish entirely from the world. Our

**Denktagebuch*, August 1950.

prejudices invade our thoughts; they throw the baby out with the bathwater, confuse politics with what would put an end to politics, and present that very catastrophe as if it were inherent in the nature of things and thus inevitable.

Underlying our prejudices against politics today are hope and fear: the fear that humanity could destroy itself through politics and through the means of force now at its disposal, and, linked with this fear, the hope that humanity will come to its senses and rid the world, not of humankind, but of politics. It could do so through a world government that transforms the state into an administrative machine, resolves political conflicts bureaucratically, and replaces armies with police forces. If politics is defined in its usual sense, as a relationship between the rulers and the ruled, this hope is, of course, purely utopian. In taking this point of view, we would end up not with the abolition of politics, but with a despotism of massive proportions in which the abyss separating the rulers from the ruled would be so gigantic that any sort of rebellion would no longer be possible, not to mention any form of control of the rulers by the ruled. The fact that no individual—no despot, per se—could be identified within this world government would in no way change its despotic character. Bureaucratic rule, the anonymous rule of the bureaucrat, is no less despotic because "nobody" exercises it. On the contrary, it is more fearsome still, because no one can speak with or petition this "nobody."

If, however, we understand politics to mean a global dominion in which people appear primarily as active agents who lend human affairs a permanence they otherwise do not have, then this hope is not the least bit utopian. Though it has never happened on a global scale, there are plenty of historical examples of people being shunted aside as active agents—whether in the form of

what seems to us old-fashioned tyranny, where the will of one man is given free rein, or in the modern form of totalitarianism, in which alleged higher, impersonal "historical forces" and processes are unleashed, and human beings are enslaved to their service. The nature of this form of domination, which in a profound sense is truly apolitical, is evident precisely in the dynamic which it generates and to which it is peculiar; a dynamic in which everything and everyone regarded as "great" only just yesterday can and must—if the movement is to retain its momentum—be consigned to oblivion today. Yet it can hardly be a source of comfort amid such concerns that we are compelled to note how, on the one hand, among the populace of mass democracies, a similar impotence is spreading spontaneously, so to speak, and without any use of terror, while, on the other hand, a similar permanently self-perpetuating process of consumption and forgetting is taking root, even if in the free, unterrorized world these phenomena are still limited to the spheres of economics or politics in the narrow sense of the word.

But prejudices against politics—the idea that domestic policy is a fabric of lies and deceptions woven by shady interests and even shadier ideologies, while foreign policy vacillates between vapid propaganda and the exercise of raw power—reach back much further than the invention of devices capable of destroying all organic life on earth. In terms of domestic politics, these prejudices are at least as old as party-driven democracy—that is, somewhat more than a hundred years—which for the first time in modern history claimed to represent the people, even though the people themselves never believed it. As for foreign policy, we can probably place its origins in those first decades of imperialist expansion at the turn of the century, when the nation-state began, not on behalf of the nation, but rather on behalf of national eco-

nomic interests, to extend European rule across the globe. But what gives the widespread prejudice against politics its real force today—the flight into impotence, the desperate desire to be relieved entirely of the ability to act—was in those days the prejudice and privilege of a small class that believed, as Lord Acton put it, that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Perhaps no one recognized more clearly than Nietzsche—in his attempt to rehabilitate power—that this condemnation of power clearly reflected the as yet unarticulated yearnings of the masses, although he too, very much in the spirit of the times, identified or confused power—which no individual can ever possess, since it can arise only out of the cooperative action of many people—with the use of force, the means of which, to be sure, an individual can seize and control.

Prejudice and Judgment

The prejudices that we share, that we take to be self-evident, that we can toss out in conversation without any lengthy explanations, are, as already noted, themselves political in the broadest sense of the word—that is, something that constitutes an integral part of those human affairs that are the context in which we go about our daily lives. That prejudices play such a large role in daily life and therefore in politics is not something we should bemoan as such, or for that matter attempt to change. Man cannot live without prejudices, and not only because no human being's intelligence or insight would suffice to form an original judgment about everything on which he is asked to pass judgment in the course of his life, but also because such a total lack of prejudice would require a superhuman alertness. That is why in all times and places it is the task of politics to shed light upon and dispel prejudices, which is not to say that its task is to train people to be unprejudiced or that

those who work toward such enlightenment are themselves free of prejudice. The degree of alertness and open-mindedness in a given epoch determines its general physiognomy and the level of its political life, but an epoch in which people could not fall back on and trust their prejudices when judging and deciding about major areas of their lives is inconceivable.

Obviously this justification of prejudice as the standard for judgment in everyday life has its limits. It indeed applies only to genuine prejudices—that is, to those that do not claim to be judgments. Genuine prejudices are normally recognized by their unabashed appeal to the authority of "they say" or "the opinion is," although of course such an appeal does not need to be explicitly stated. Prejudices are not personal idiosyncrasies, which, however immune to proof, always have a basis in personal experience, within which context they lay claim to the evidence of sensory perception. Because they exist outside of experience, however, prejudices can never provide such evidence, not even for those who are subject to them. But precisely because they are not tied to personal experience they can count on the ready assent of others, without ever making an effort to convince them. In this respect, prejudice differs from judgment. What it shares with judgment, however, is the way in which people recognize themselves and their commonality, so that someone caught up in prejudices can always be certain of having an effect on others, whereas what is idiosyncratic can hardly ever prevail in the public and political sphere and has an effect only in the intimacy of privacy. Consequently prejudice plays a major role in the social arena. There really is no social structure which is not based more or less on prejudices that include certain people while excluding others. The freer a person is of prejudices of any kind, the less suitable he will be for the purely social realm. Within that realm, however,

we do not make any claim to judge, and our waiving of that claim, our substitution of prejudice for judgment, becomes dangerous only if it spreads into the political arena, where we cannot function at all without judgment, in which political thought is essentially based.

One of the reasons for the power and danger of prejudices lies in the fact that something of the past is always hidden within them. Upon closer examination, we realize that a genuine prejudice always conceals some previously formed judgment which originally had its own appropriate and legitimate experiential basis, and which evolved into a prejudice only because it was dragged through time without its ever being reexamined or revised. In this respect, prejudice differs from mere small talk, which doesn't survive the day or hour of our chatter and in which the most heterogeneous opinions and judgments whir and tumble like fragments in a kaleidoscope. The danger of prejudice lies in the very fact that it is always anchored in the past—so uncommonly well-anchored that it not only anticipates and blocks judgment, but also makes both judgment and a genuine experience of the present impossible. If we want to dispel prejudices, we must first discover the past judgments contained within them, which is to say, we must reveal whatever truth lies within them. If we neglect to do this, whole battalions of enlightened orators and entire libraries of brochures will achieve nothing, as is made eminently clear by the truly endless and endlessly fruitless efforts to deal with issues burdened with ancient prejudices, such as the problem of the Jews, or of Negroes in the United States.

Because prejudice anticipates judgment by harkening back to the past, its temporal justification is limited to those historical epochs—and in quantitative terms they make up the lion's share of history—in which the new is relatively rare and the old domi-

nates the political and social fabric. In our general usage, the word "judgment" has two meanings that certainly ought to be differentiated but that always get confused whenever we speak. First of all, judgment means organizing and subsuming the individual and particular under the general and universal, thereby making an orderly assessment by applying standards by which the concrete is identified, and according to which decisions are then made. Behind all such judgments there is a prejudgment, a prejudice. Only the individual case is judged, but not the standard itself or whether it is an appropriate measure of what it is used to measure. At some point a judgment was rendered about the standard, but now that judgment has been adopted and has become, as it were, a means for rendering further judgments. Judgment can, however, mean something totally different, and indeed it always does when we are confronted with something which we have never seen before and for which there are no standards at our disposal. This judgment that knows no standards can appeal to nothing but the evidence of what is being judged, and its sole prerequisite is the faculty of judgment, which has far more to do with man's ability to make distinctions than with his ability to organize and subsume. Such judgment without standards is quite familiar to us from judgments about aesthetics and taste, which, as Kant once observed, we cannot "dispute," but certainly can argue over or agree with. We recognize this in everyday life whenever, in some unfamiliar situation, we say that this or that person judged the situation rightly or wrongly.

In every historical crisis, it is the prejudices that begin to crumble first and can no longer be relied upon. Precisely because within the nonbinding context of "people say" and "people think"; within the limited context where prejudices are justified and used, they can no longer count upon being accepted, they

easily ossify, turning into something that by nature they most definitely are not—that is, into pseudotheories, which, as closed worldviews or ideologies with an explanation for everything, pretend to understand all historical and political reality. If it is the function of prejudice to spare the judging individual from having to open himself to, and thoughtfully confront, every facet of reality he encounters, then worldviews and ideologies are so good at this that they somehow shield us from all experience by making ostensible provision for all reality. It is this claim to universality that so clearly distinguishes ideology from prejudice, which is always only partial in nature, just as it also clearly states that we are no longer to rely on prejudices—and not only on them, but also on our standards of judgment and the prejudgments based on such standards—by declaring them to be literally inappropriate. The failure of standards in the modern world—the impossibility of judging anew what has happened and daily happens, on the basis of firm standards recognized by everyone, and of subsuming those events as cases of some well-known general principle, as well as the closely linked difficulty of providing principles of action for what should now happen—has often been described as a nihilism inherent in our age, as a devaluation of values, a sort of twilight of the gods, a catastrophe in the world's moral order. All such interpretations tacitly assume that human beings can be expected to render judgments only if they possess standards, that the faculty of judgment is thus nothing more than the ability to assign individual cases to their correct and proper places within the general principles which are applicable to them and about which everyone is in agreement.

Granted, we know that the faculty of judgment insists and must insist on making judgments directly and without any standards, but the areas in which this occurs—in decisions of all sorts,

both personal and public, and in so-called matters of taste—are themselves not taken seriously. The reason for this is that in fact such judgments are never of a compulsory nature, never force others into agreement in the sense of a logically irrefutable conclusion, but rather can only persuade. Moreover, the idea that there is something compulsory about such judgments is itself a prejudice. For as long as standards remain in force, there is no compulsory proof inherent in them; standards are based on the same limited evidence inherent in a judgment upon which we all have agreed and no longer need to dispute or argue about. The only compulsory proof comes as the result of our categorizing, of our measuring and applying standards, of our *method* of ordering the individual and concrete, which, by the very nature of the enterprise, presumes the validity of the standard. This categorizing and ordering, in which nothing is decided except whether we have gone about our task in a demonstrably correct or incorrect way, has more to do with thinking as deductive reasoning than with thinking as an act of judgment. The loss of standards, which does indeed define the modern world in its facticity and cannot be reversed by any sort of return to the good old days or by some arbitrary promulgation of new standards and values, is therefore a catastrophe in the moral world only if one assumes that people are actually incapable of judging things per se, that their faculty of judgment is inadequate for making original judgments, and that the most we can demand of it is the correct application of familiar rules derived from already established standards.

If this were so, if human thinking were of such a nature that it could judge only if it had cut-and-dried standards in hand, then indeed it would be correct to say, as seems to be generally assumed, that in the crisis of the modern world it is not so much the world as it is man himself who has come unhinged. This

assumption prevails throughout the mills of academia nowadays, and is most clearly evident in the fact that the historical disciplines dealing with the history of the world and of what happens in it were dissolved first into the social sciences and then into psychology. This is an unmistakable indication that the study of a historically formed world in its assumed chronological layers has been abandoned in favor of the study, first, of societal and, second, of individual modes of behavior. Modes of behavior can never be the object of systematic research, or they can be only if one excludes man as an active agent, the author of demonstrable events in the world, and demotes him to a creature who merely behaves differently in different situations, on whom one can conduct experiments, and who, one may even hope, can ultimately be brought under control. Even more significant than this argument among academic faculties, in which, to be sure, quite unacademic power plays have surfaced, is a similar shift of interest away from the world and toward man, evidenced in the results of a recently circulated questionnaire. The response to the question: What gives you greatest cause for concern today? was almost unanimous: man. This was not, however, meant in the manifest sense of the threat the atomic bomb poses to the human race (a concern indeed only too justified); evidently what was meant was the nature of man, whatever each individual respondent may have understood that to be. In both of these cases—and we could, of course, cite any number of others—there is not a moment's doubt that it is man who has lost his bearings or is in danger of doing so, or who, at any rate, is what we need to change.

Regardless of how people respond to the question of whether it is man or the world that is in jeopardy in the present crisis, one thing is certain: any response that places man in the center of our current worries and suggests he must be changed before any

relief is to be found is profoundly unpolitical. For at the center of politics lies concern for the world, not for man—a concern, in fact, for a world, however constituted, without which those who are both concerned and political would not find life worth living. And we can no more change a world by changing the people in it—quite apart from the practical impossibility of such an enterprise—than we can change an organization or a club by attempting to influence its members in one way or another. If we want to change an institution, an organization, some public body existing within the world, we can only revise its constitution, its laws, its statutes, and hope that all the rest will take care of itself. This is so because wherever human beings come together—be it in private or socially, be it in public or politically—a space is generated that simultaneously gathers them into it and separates them from one another. Every such space has its own structure that changes over time and reveals itself in a private context as custom, in a social context as convention, and in a public context as laws, constitutions, statutes, and the like. Wherever people come together, the world thrusts itself between them, and it is in this in-between space that all human affairs are conducted.

The space between men, which is the world, cannot, of course, exist without them, and a world without human beings, as over against a universe without human beings or nature without human beings, would be a contradiction in terms. But this does not mean that the world and the catastrophes that occur in it should be regarded as a purely human occurrence, much less that they should be reduced to something that happens to *man* or to the nature of man. For the world and the things of this world, in the midst of which human affairs take place, are not the expression of human nature, that is, the imprint of human nature turned outward, but, on the contrary, are the result of the fact that human

beings produce what they themselves are not—that is, things—and that even the so-called psychological or intellectual realms become permanent realities in which people can live and move only to the extent that these realms are present as things, as a world of things. It is within this world of things that human beings act and are themselves conditioned, and because they are conditioned by it, every catastrophe that occurs within it strikes back at them, affects them. We can conceive of a catastrophe so monstrous, so world-destroying, that it would likewise affect man's ability to produce his world and its things, and leave him as worldless as any animal. We can even conceive that such catastrophes have occurred in the prehistoric past, and that certain so-called primitive peoples are their residue, their worldless vestiges. We can also imagine that nuclear war, if it leaves any human life at all in its wake, could precipitate such a catastrophe by destroying the entire world. The reason human beings will then perish, however, is not themselves, but, as always, the world, or better, the course of the world over which they no longer have mastery, from which they are so alienated that the automatic forces inherent in every process can proceed unchecked. And the aforementioned modern concern about man does not even address such possibilities. The awful and frightening thing about that concern is, rather, that it is not in the least worried about such "externalities" and thus about ultimate real dangers, but escapes into an interior where at best reflection is possible, but not action or change.

One can, of course, offer the facile objection that the world, about which we are speaking here, is the world of men, that it is the result of human productivity and human action, whatever one may understand those to be. These abilities do indeed belong to the nature of man; if they prove inadequate, must we not then

change the nature of man before we can think about changing the world? At its core this is an ancient objection that can appeal to the very best of all witnesses—to Plato, who reproached Pericles for having left the Athenians no better off after his death than they were before.

What Is the Meaning of Politics?

The answer to the question of the meaning of politics is so simple and so conclusive that one might think all other answers are utterly beside the point. The answer is: The meaning of politics is freedom. Its simplicity and conclusive force lie not in the fact that it is as old as the question itself—which of course arises out of uncertainty and is inspired by mistrust—but in the existence of politics as such. Today this answer is in fact neither self-evident nor immediately plausible. This is apparent in the fact that the question nowadays is no longer one that simply asks about the meaning of politics, as people once did when politics first arose from experiences that were either of a nonpolitical or even an antipolitical nature. Our question nowadays arises out of the very real experiences we have had with politics; it is ignited by the disaster politics has wrought in our century and the still greater disaster that threatens to emerge from politics. Our question is thus far more radical, more aggressive, and more desperate: Does politics still have any meaning at all?

Stated in this way—and by now it is the way it poses itself for everyone—the question resonates with two important factors: First, our experience with totalitarian governments, in which the totality of human life is claimed to be so totally politicized that under them there is no longer any freedom whatsoever. Viewed from this vantage point—and that means, among other things, from conditions that are specifically modern—the question arises

whether politics and freedom are at all compatible, whether freedom does not first begin precisely where politics ends, so that freedom cannot exist wherever politics has not yet found its limit and its end. Perhaps things have changed so much since classical times, when politics and freedom were deemed identical, that now, under modern conditions, they must be definitively separated.

The second fact that necessitates the question is the monstrous development of modern means of destruction over which states have a monopoly, but which never could have been developed without that monopoly and which can be employed only within the political arena. Here the issue is not just freedom but life itself, the continuing existence of humanity and perhaps of all organic life on earth. The question that arises here makes all politics problematic; it makes it appear doubtful whether politics and the preservation of life are even compatible under modern conditions, and its secret hope is that people may prove insightful enough somehow to dispense with politics before politics destroys us all. Granted, one can object that the hope that all states will die away or that politics will vanish by some other means is itself utopian, and one can assume that most people would agree to this objection. But that in no way alters the hope or the question. If politics brings disaster, and if one cannot do away with politics, then all that is left is despair, or the hope that we won't have to eat our soup as hot as it comes off the stove—a rather foolish hope in our century, inasmuch as since World War I, every political soup we've had to eat has been hotter than any cook would have intended to serve it.

Both these experiences—totalitarianism and the atomic bomb—ignite the question about the meaning of politics in our time. They are the fundamental experiences of our age, and if we

ignore them, it is as if we never lived in the world that is our world. Nevertheless there is a difference between the two. Over against the experience of total politicization in totalitarian governments and the resultant problematic nature of politics, we must still deal with the fact that since antiquity, no one has believed that the meaning of politics is freedom; and with the additional fact that in the modern world, both theoretically and practically, politics has been seen as a means for protecting both society's life-sustaining resources and the productivity of its open and free development. In response to the dubiousness of politics as experienced under totalitarian governments, there might also be a theoretical retreat to an earlier standpoint in historical terms—as if nothing provided better proof than totalitarian governments of just how right the liberal and conservative thinking of the nineteenth century had been. The distressing thing about the emergence within politics of the possibility of absolute physical annihilation is that it renders such a retreat totally impossible. For here politics threatens the very thing that, according to modern opinion, provides its ultimate justification—that is, the basic possibility of life for all of humanity. If it is true that politics is nothing more than a necessary evil for sustaining the life of humanity, then politics has indeed begun to banish itself from the world and to transform its meaning into meaninglessness.

This meaninglessness is not some contrived hurdle. It is a very real fact, which we would experience every day if we bothered not just to read the newspaper but also, out of indignation at the muddle that's been made of all important political problems, to pose the question of how, given this situation, things might be done better. The meaninglessness in which politics finds itself is evident from the fact that all individual political questions now end in an impasse. No matter how hard we try to under-

stand the situation and take into account the individual factors that this twofold threat of totalitarian states and atomic weapons represents—a threat only made worse by their conjunction—we cannot so much as conceive of a satisfactory solution, not even presuming the best will on all sides, which as we know does not work in politics, since no goodwill today is any sort of guarantee of goodwill tomorrow. If we proceed from the logic inherent in these factors and assume that nothing except those conditions we now know determines the present or future course of our world, we might say that a decisive change for the better can come about only through some sort of miracle.

To ask in all seriousness what such a miracle might look like, and to dispel the suspicion that hoping for or, more accurately, counting on miracles is utterly foolish and frivolous, we first have to forget the role that miracles have always played in faith and superstition—that is, in religions and pseudoreligions. In order to free ourselves from the prejudice that a miracle is solely a genuinely religious phenomenon by which something supernatural and superhuman breaks into natural events or the natural course of human affairs, it might be useful to remind ourselves briefly that the entire framework of our physical existence—the existence of the earth, of organic life on earth, of the human species itself—rests upon a sort of miracle. For, from the standpoint of universal occurrences and the statistically calculable probabilities controlling them, the formation of the earth is an "infinite improbability." And the same holds for the genesis of organic life from the processes of inorganic nature, or the origin of the human species out of the evolutionary processes of organic life. It is clear from these examples that whenever something new occurs, it bursts into the context of predictable processes as something unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately

causally inexplicable—just like a miracle. In other words every new beginning is by nature a miracle when seen and experienced from the standpoint of the processes it necessarily interrupts. In this sense—that is, within the context of processes into which it bursts—the demonstrably real transcendence of each beginning corresponds to the religious transcendence of believing in miracles.

This, of course, is merely an example to help explain that what we call real is already a web which is woven of earthly, organic, and human realities, but which has come into existence through the addition of infinite improbabilities. If we take this example as a metaphor for what actually happens in the realm of human affairs, it immediately pulls up lame. For the processes that we are dealing with here are, as we've said, of a historical nature, which means they do not proceed according to the pattern of natural developments but are sequences of events whose structure is so frequently interspersed with infinite improbabilities that any talk of miracles seems odd to us. But that is simply because the process of history has arisen out of human initiatives and is constantly interrupted by new initiatives. If we view this process purely as process—which is, of course, what happens in all philosophies of history for which the process of history is not the result of men acting together, but of the development and coincidence of extrahuman, superhuman, or subhuman energies, from which man as the active agent is excluded—every new beginning, whether for good or ill, is so infinitely improbable that all major events look like miracles. Viewed objectively and from outside, the odds in favor of tomorrow unfolding just like today are always overwhelming—and thus, in human terms, approximately, if not exactly, as great as those against the earth developing out of cosmic occurrences, against life arising out of

inorganic processes, or of man, the nonanimal, resulting from the evolution of animal species.

The crucial difference between the infinite improbabilities on which earthly human life is based and miraculous events in the arena of human affairs lies, of course, in the fact that in the latter case there is a miracle worker—that is, that man himself evidently has a most amazing and mysterious talent for working miracles. The normal, hackneyed word our language provides for this talent is "action." Action is unique in that it sets in motion processes that in their automatism look very much like natural processes, and action also marks the start of something, begins something new, seizes the initiative, or, in Kantian terms, forges its own chain. The miracle of freedom is inherent in this ability to make a beginning, which itself is inherent in the fact that every human being, simply by being born into a world that was there before him and will be there after him, is himself a new beginning.

The idea that freedom is identical with beginning or, again to use a Kantian term, with spontaneity, seems strange to us because, according to our tradition of conceptual thought and its categories, freedom is equated with freedom of the will, and we understand freedom of the will to be a choice between givens or, to put it crudely, between good and evil. We do not see freedom as simply wanting this or that to be changed in some way or other. Our tradition is based, to be sure, on its own good reasons, which we need not go into here, except to note that since the waning years of classical antiquity it has been extraordinarily reinforced by the widespread conviction that freedom not only does not lie in action and in politics, but, on the contrary, is possible only if man renounces action and withdraws from the world and into himself, avoiding politics altogether. This conceptual and categorical tradition is contradicted by everyone's experience, be it public or pri-

vate, and it is contradicted above all by the never entirely forgotten evidence found in the classical languages, where the Greek verb *archein* means both to begin and to lead, that is, to be free, and the Latin verb *agere* means to set something in motion, to unleash a process.

If, then, we expect miracles as a consequence of the impasse in which our world finds itself, such an expectation in no way banishes us from the political realm in its original sense. If the meaning of politics is freedom, that means that in this realm—and in no other—we do indeed have the right to expect miracles. Not because we superstitiously believe in miracles, but because human beings, whether or not they know it, as long as they can act, are capable of achieving, and constantly do achieve, the improbable and unpredictable. The question of whether politics still has any meaning inevitably sends us, at that very point where it ends in a belief in miracles—and where else could it possibly end?—right back to the question of the meaning of politics.

The Meaning of Politics

Both the mistrust of politics and the question as to the meaning of politics are very old, as old as the tradition of political philosophy. They go back to Plato and perhaps even to Parmenides, and they arose out of the very real experiences that these philosophers had in the polis, which is to say, in an organizational form of human communal life that determined in such exemplary and definitive ways what we still understand by politics that even the word "politics" in all European languages is derived from the Greek *polis*.

Equally as old as the question about the meaning of politics are the answers that offer justification for politics, and almost all the definitions in our tradition are essentially justifications. To put it

in very general terms, all these justifications or definitions end up characterizing politics as a means to some higher end, although, to be sure, definitions of what that end should be have varied widely down through the centuries. Varied as they are, however, they can be traced back to a few basic answers, and this fact speaks for the elementary simplicity of what it is we are dealing with here.

Politics, so we are told, is an absolute necessity for human life, not only for the life of society but for the individual as well. Because man is not self-sufficient but is dependent in his existence on others, provisions must be made that affect the existence of all, since without such provisions, communal life would be impossible. The task, the end purpose, of politics is to safeguard life in the broadest sense. Politics makes it possible for the individual to pursue his own ends, to be, that is, unmolested by politics—and it makes no difference what those spheres of life are that politics is supposed to safeguard, whether its purpose is, as the Greeks thought, to make it possible for a few to concern themselves with philosophy or, in the modern sense, to secure life, livelihood, and a minimum of happiness for the many. Moreover, as Madison once remarked, since our concern is the communal life of men and not angels, provisions for human existence can be achieved only by the state, which holds a monopoly on brute force and prevents the war of all against all.

These answers take it as self-evident that politics has existed in all times and everywhere that men live communally in any historical and civilizing sense. This assumption customarily appeals to the Aristotelian definition of man as a political animal, and that same appeal is of no small importance, since the polis has decisively shaped, both in language and content, the European concept of what politics actually is and what meaning it has. It is likewise of no small importance that this appeal to Aristotle is

based on a very old, although postclassical, misunderstanding. For Aristotle the word *politikon* was an adjective that applied to the organization of the polis and not a designation for just any form of human communal life, and he certainly did not think that all men are political or that there is politics, that is, a polis, no matter where people live. His definition excluded not just slaves, but also barbarians, who were ruled by despots in Asian empires but whose humanity he never doubted. What he meant was merely that it is unique to man that he *can* live in a polis and that the organized polis is the highest form of human communal life and thus something specifically human, at equal remove from the gods, who can exist in and of themselves in full freedom and independence, and animals, whose communal life, if they have such a thing, is a matter of necessity. As with many other issues in his political writings, Aristotle was providing not so much his personal opinion as he was reflecting a view shared with all other Greeks of the period, even if that view usually went unarticulated. Thus politics in the Aristotelian sense is not self-evident and most certainly is not found everywhere men live in community. It existed, as the Greeks saw it, only in Greece—and even there for only a relatively short period of time.

What distinguishes the communal life of people in the polis from all other forms of human communal life—with which the Greeks were most certainly familiar—is freedom. This does not mean, however, that the political realm was understood as a means to make human freedom—a free life—possible. Being free and living in the polis were, in a certain sense, one and the same. But only in a certain sense, for to be able to live in a polis at all, man already had to be free in another regard—he could not be subject as a slave to someone else's domination, or as a worker to the necessity of earning his daily bread. Man must first be liber-

ated or liberate himself in order to enjoy freedom, and being liberated from domination by life's necessities was the true meaning of the Greek word *scholē* or the Latin *otium*—what we today call leisure. This liberation, in contrast to freedom, was an end that could, and had to, be achieved by certain means. This crucial means was slavery, the brute force by which one man compelled others to relieve him of the cares of daily life. Unlike all forms of capitalist exploitation, which pursue primarily economic ends aimed at increasing wealth, the point of the exploitation of slaves in classical Greece was to liberate their masters entirely from labor so that they then might enjoy the freedom of the political arena. This liberation was accomplished by force and compulsion, and was based on the absolute rule that every head of household exercised over his house. But this rule was not itself political, although it was an indispensable prerequisite of all things political. If one wishes to understand politics within the context of the categories of means and ends, politics in the Greek sense was, as it was for Aristotle, primarily an end and not a means. And that end was not freedom as such, as it was realized in the polis, but rather the prepolitical liberation for the exercise of freedom in the polis. Here the meaning of politics, in distinction to its end, is that men in their freedom can interact with one another without compulsion, force, and rule over one another, as equals among equals, commanding and obeying one another only in emergencies—that is, in times of war—but otherwise managing all their affairs by speaking with and persuading one another.

"Politics," in the Greek sense of the word, is therefore centered around freedom, whereby freedom is understood negatively as not being ruled or ruling, and positively as a space which can be created only by men and in which each man moves among his peers. Without those who are my equals, there is no freedom,

which is why the man who rules over others—and for that very reason is different from them on principle—is indeed a happier and more enviable man than those over whom he rules, but he is not one whit freer. He too moves in a sphere in which there is no freedom whatever. We find this difficult to understand because we link equality with the concept of justice, not with that of freedom, which is why we misunderstand the Greek term for a free constitution, *isonomia*, to mean what equality before the law means for us. But *isonomia* does not mean that all men are equal before the law, or that the law is the same for all, but merely that all have the same claim to political activity, and in the polis this activity primarily took the form of speaking with one another. *Isonomia* is therefore essentially the equal right to speak, and as such the same thing as *isēgoria;* later, in Polybius, both simply mean *isologia*.* To speak in the form of commanding and to hear in the form of obeying were not considered actual speech and hearing; they were not free because they were bound up with a process defined not by speaking but by doing and laboring. Words, in this case, were only a substitute for doing something, and, in fact, something that presumed the use of force and being forced. When the Greeks said that slaves and barbarians were *aneu logou* (without words), what they meant was that the situation of slaves and barbarians made them incapable of free speech. The despot, who knows only commands, finds himself in the same situation; in order to speak, he would need others who are his equals. Freedom does not require an egalitarian democracy in the modern sense, but rather a quite narrowly limited oligarchy or aristocracy, an arena in which at least a few or the best can interact with one another as equals among equals. This equality has, of course, nothing to do with justice.

**Isēgoria* and *isologia* explicitly refer to equal freedom of speech.—Ed.

The crucial point about this kind of political freedom is that it is a spatial construct. Whoever leaves his polis or is banished from it loses not just his hometown or his fatherland; he also loses the only space in which he can be free—and he loses the society of his equals. But in terms of life and his being provided with its necessities, this space of freedom was scarcely necessary or indispensable; indeed it was more of a hindrance. The Greeks knew from personal experience that a reasonable tyrant (what we would call an enlightened despot) worked to great advantage when it came to a city's welfare and to whether the arts, both material and intellectual, flourished within it. But with the tyrant came an end to freedom. Citizens were banished to their homes, and the agora, the space where the interaction of equals was played out, was deserted. There was no longer a space for freedom, and that meant that political freedom no longer existed.

This is not the place to discuss what else was lost with this loss of political space, which in classical Greece coincides with the loss of freedom. Our only concern here was to provide a brief retrospective glance at what was originally included in the concept of politics, so that we might be cured of our modern prejudice that politics is an ineluctable necessity, and that it has existed always and everywhere. A necessity—whether in the sense of an undeniable need of human nature, like hunger or love, or whether in the sense of an indispensable institution of human communal life—is precisely what politics is not. In fact, it begins where the realm of material necessities and physical brute force end. Politics as such has existed so rarely and in so few places that, historically speaking, only a few great epochs have known it and turned it into a reality. These few grand strokes of historical good fortune, however, have been crucial; only in them has the meaning of politics—in both the benefits and the mischief that come with it—been fully manifested. And such epochs have then set the

standard, but not in such a way that the organizational forms inherent in them could then be imitated, but rather so that certain ideas and concepts, which for a brief time were fully realized in them, also determine those epochs denied a full experience of political reality.

The most important of these ideas, the one that remains a compellingly valid part of our concept of politics and has thus survived all historical reversals and theoretical transformations, is without doubt the idea of freedom. The idea that politics and freedom are bound together, making tyranny the worst of political governments and indeed antipolitical, threads its way through the thinking and action of European culture down to recent times. Not until totalitarian regimes and the ideologies congruent with them did anyone dare to cut this thread—not even Marxism, which, up to that point, had announced the realm of freedom and a dictatorship of the proletariat (conceived in the Roman sense) as a temporary instrument of revolution. What makes totalitarianism truly new and terrifying is not its denial of freedom or the claim that freedom is neither good nor necessary for humankind, but rather the notion that human freedom must be sacrificed to historical development, a process that can be impeded only when human beings act and interact in freedom. This view is shared by all specifically ideological political movements, in which the crucial theoretical issue is that freedom is not localized in either human beings in their action and interaction or in the space that forms between men, but rather is assigned to a process that unfolds behind the backs of those who act and does its work in secret, beyond the visible arena of public affairs. The model for this concept of freedom is a river flowing freely, in which every attempt to block its flow is an arbitrary impediment. Those in the modern world who replace the ancient dichotomy of freedom and

necessity by equating it with the dichotomy of freedom and arbitrary action find their unspoken justification in this model. In every such case, the concept of politics, however variously constituted, is replaced by the modern concept of history. Political events and political action are absorbed into the historical process, and history comes to mean, in a very literal sense, the flow of history. The distinction between such pervasive ideological thinking and totalitarian regimes lies in the fact that the latter have discovered the political means to integrate human beings into the flow of history in such a way that they are so totally caught up in its "freedom," in its "free flow," that they can no longer obstruct it but instead become impulses for its acceleration. This is accomplished by means of coercive terror applied from outside and coercive ideological thinking unleashed from within—a form of thinking that joins the current of history and becomes, as it were, an intrinsic part of its flow. Without a doubt, this totalitarian development is the decisive step on the path toward abolishing freedom in the real world. But this does not mean that the concept of freedom has not already disappeared in theory wherever modern thought has replaced the concept of politics with the concept of history.

Once it was born within the Greek polis, the idea that politics is inevitably bound to freedom was able to hold on through the millennia, which is all the more remarkable and comforting inasmuch as there is scarcely any other concept of Western thinking and experience that has undergone such change and enrichment over time. Freedom originally meant nothing more than being able to go where one pleased, but this included more than what we understand today as freedom of movement. It did not mean merely that one was not subject to coercion by another person, but also that one could remove oneself from the entire realm of coercion—of the household, along with its "family" (itself a Roman con-

cept, that Mommsen once brusquely translated as "servitude" [Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte,* vol. 1, p. 62]). Only the master of the household had this freedom, and what constituted it was not his dominion over other members of his household, but that, on the basis of that same dominion, he could abandon his household, his family in the classical sense. It is obvious that from the start there was an element of risk, of daring, inherent in this freedom. The household, which a free man could leave at will, was not just the place where man was ruled by necessity and coercion, but also the place where the life of every individual—though bound up in that necessity and coercion—was secured, where everything was organized to provide enough of life's necessities. Thus only that man was free who was prepared to risk his own life, and it was the man with the unfree and servile soul who clung too dearly to life—a vice for which the Greek language has a special word: *philopsychia*.*

The notion that only he is free who is prepared to risk his life has never vanished entirely from our consciousness; and that also holds true in general for the connection of politics with danger and risk. Courage is the earliest of all political virtues, and even today it is still one of the few cardinal virtues of politics, because only by stepping out of our private existence and the familial relationships to which our lives are tied can we make our way into the common public world that is our truly political space. Very early on, the space entered by those who dared to cross the threshold of their houses ceased to be a realm of great enterprise and adventures that a man might embark on and hope to survive only if he were joined by his equals. Though the world that lay open to such stouthearted and enterprising adventurers was, to be sure, public,

*Literally, love of life, with the connotation of faintheartedness.—Ed.

it was not yet a political space in the true sense. The realm into which such men of daring ventured became public because they were among their equals, who were capable of seeing and hearing and admiring one another's deeds, of which the sagas of later poets and storytellers assured them lasting fame. In contrast to what occurs in privacy and in the family, in the security of one's own four walls, everything here appears in the light that can be generated only in a public space, that is, in the presence of others. But this light, which is the prerequisite of all real appearances in the world, is deceptive as long as it is merely public but not political. The public space of adventure and enterprise vanishes the moment everything has come to an end, once the army has broken camp and the "heroes"—which for Homer means simply free men—have returned home. This public space does not become political until it is secured within a city, is bound, that is, to a concrete place that itself survives both those memorable deeds and the names of the memorable men who performed them and thus can pass them on to posterity over generations. This city, which offers a permanent abode for mortal men and their transient deeds and words, is the polis; it is political and therefore different from other settlements (for which the Greeks had a different word: *astē*), because it is purposefully built around its public space, the agora, where free men could meet as peers on any occasion.

This close link between politics and the Homeric accounts is of great importance for our understanding of our own political concept of freedom and how it arose in the Greek polis. And this is true not only because Homer ultimately became the educator of the polis, but also because to the Greek way of thinking the founding of the polis as an institution is closely linked to experiences contained within the Homeric accounts. Thus the Greeks had no difficulty transferring the central concept of a free polis,

free of any tyrant's rule—that is, the concept of *isonomia* and *isēgoria*—back to Homeric times, because the example of the magnificent experience of life's possibilities among one's equals was already present in the Homeric epics; and one could also, and this was perhaps even more important, see the rise of the polis as a response to these experiences. This could occur negatively, so to speak—in the same way that Pericles refers to Homer in his funeral oration. The polis had to be founded to secure for the grandeur of human deeds and speech an abode more secure than the commemoration that the poet had recorded and perpetuated in his poem (Thucydides, ii, 41). But it could also be regarded positively—in the same way that Plato once suggested (in his *Eleventh Letter*, 359b) that the polis arose from the conjunction of great events in war or other deeds—that is, from political activity and its inherent greatness. In both cases it is as if the Homeric army never disbanded but upon its return to the homeland reassembled, established the polis, and thus found a space where it could stay permanently intact. Whatever changes this permanence might undergo in the future, the substance of the space of the polis remained tied to its origins in the Homeric world.

To be sure, it is only natural within a political space in the true sense that what is understood by freedom will shift in meaning. The point of enterprise and of adventure fades more and more, and whereas what before was, so to speak, only a necessary adjunct to such adventures, the constant presence of others, dealing with others in the public space of the agora, the *isēgoria* as Herodotus puts it, now becomes the real substance of a free life. At the same time, the most important activity of a free life moves from action to speech, from free deeds to free words.

This shift is of great importance and possesses greater validity within the tradition of our concept of freedom—in which the

notions of action and speech are kept separate on principle, corresponding, as it were, to two entirely different faculties of man—than was ever the case in the history of Greece. For it is one of the most remarkable and fascinating facts of Greek thought that from the very beginning, which means as early as Homer, such a separation on principle between speech and action does not occur, since a doer of great deeds must at the same time always be a speaker of great words—and not only because great words were needed to accompany and explain great deeds that would otherwise fall into mute oblivion, but also because speech itself was from the start considered a form of action. Man cannot defend himself against the blows of fate, against the chicanery of the gods, but he can resist them in speech and respond to them, and though the response changes nothing, neither turning ill fortune aside nor prompting good fortune, such words belong to the event as such. If words are of equal rank with the event, if, as is said at the end of *Antigone,* "great words" answer and requite "great blows struck from on high," then what happens is itself something great and worthy of remembrance and fame. Speech in this sense is a form of action, and our downfall can become a deed if we hurl words against it even as we perish. Greek tragedy—its drama, its enacted events—is based on this fundamental conviction.

This understanding of speech, which also underlies the discovery by Greek philosophy of the autonomous power of the *logos,* already begins to fade in the experience of the polis, only to vanish entirely from the tradition of political thought. Rather early on, freedom of opinion—the right to hear the opinions of others and to have one's own opinion heard, which for us still constitutes an inalienable component of political freedom—displaced this other version of freedom, which, though it does not contradict

freedom of opinion, is peculiarly associated with action and speech insofar as speech is an act. This freedom consists of what we call spontaneity, which, according to Kant, is based on the ability of every human being to initiate a sequence, to forge a new chain. Perhaps the best illustration within the arena of Greek politics that freedom of action is the same thing as starting anew and beginning something is that the word *archein* means both to begin and to lead. This twofold meaning manifestly indicates that originally the term "leader" was used for the person who initiated something and sought out companions to help him carry it out; and this carrying out, this bringing something that has been begun to its end, was the original meaning of the word for action, *prattein*. The same linkage between being free and beginning something is found in the Roman idea that the greatness of the forebears was contained in the founding of Rome, and that the freedom of the Romans always had to be traced to this founding—*ab urbe condita*—where a beginning had been made. Augustine then added the ontological basis for this freedom as experienced by the Romans by saying that man himself is a beginning, an *initium*, insofar as he has not always existed but first comes into the world by birth. Despite Kant's political philosophy, which, via his experience of the French Revolution, became a philosophy of freedom, with its core centered around the concept of spontaneity, it is only in our own time that we have come to realize the extraordinary political significance of a freedom that lies in our being able to begin anew—probably precisely because totalitarian regimes have not been content simply to squelch freedom of opinion, but have also set about on principle to destroy human spontaneity in all spheres. This in turn is inevitable wherever the historical-political process is defined in deterministic terms as something that is preordained from the outset to follow

its own laws and is therefore fully knowable. But what stands in opposition to all possible predetermination and knowledge of the future is the fact that the world is daily renewed through birth and is constantly dragged into what is unpredictably new by the spontaneity of each new arrival. Only if we rob the newborn of their spontaneity, their right to begin something new, can the course of the world be defined deterministically and predicted.

Freedom of opinion and its expression, which became determinative for the polis, differs from the freedom inherent in action's ability to make a new beginning in that it is dependent to a far greater extent on the presence of others and of our being confronted with their opinions. Granted, action likewise can never occur in isolation, insofar as the person who begins something can embark upon it only after he has won over others to help him. In this sense all action is action "in concert," as Burke liked to say; "it is impossible to act without friends and reliable comrades" (Plato, *Seventh Letter,* 325d); impossible, that is, in the sense of the Greek verb *prattein,* to carry out and complete. But this is in fact only one stage of action, although as the one that ultimately determines how human affairs turn out and how they appear, it is the most politically important stage. It is preceded by the beginning, the *archein;* but such initiative, which determines who will be the leader or *archon,* the *primus inter pares,* really depends on an individual and his courage to embark on an enterprise. A single individual, Hercules for instance, can of course ultimately act alone, if the gods help him to accomplish great deeds, and he needs other people only to ensure that news of his deeds will be spread. Although all political freedom would forfeit its best and deepest meaning without this freedom of spontaneity, the latter is itself prepolitical, as it were; spontaneity depends on organizational forms of communal life only to the extent that it is

ultimately the world that can organize it. But since, in the final sense, it arises from the individual, it can, even under very unfavorable conditions—an attack by a tyrant, for example—still preserve itself. Spontaneity reveals itself in the productivity of the artist, just as it does with everyone who produces things of the world in isolation from others, and one can say that no production is possible without first having been called into life by this capacity to act. A great many human activities, however, can proceed only at some remove from the political sphere, and this remove is indeed an essential condition for certain kinds of human productivity.

This is not at all the case with the freedom to speak with one another, which is possible only in interaction with others. Free speech has always come in many different forms and with many meanings, and even in antiquity it had about it that odd ambiguity that still clings to it today. The key thing, however, both then and now, is not that a person can say whatever he pleases, or that each of us has an inherent right to express himself just as he is. The point is, rather, that we know from experience that no one can adequately grasp the objective world in its full reality all on his own, because the world always shows and reveals itself to him from only one perspective, which corresponds to his standpoint in the world and is determined by it. If someone wants to see and experience the world as it "really" is, he can do so only by understanding it as something that is shared by many people, lies between them, separates and links them, showing itself differently to each and comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another. Only in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its objectivity and visibility

from all sides. Living in a real world and speaking with one another about it are basically one and the same, and to the Greeks, private life seemed "idiotic" because it lacked the diversity that comes with speaking about something and thus the experience of how things really function in the world.*

This freedom of movement, then—whether as the freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of or as the freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality—most certainly was and is not the end purpose of politics, that is, something that can be achieved by political means. It is rather the substance and meaning of all things political. In this sense, politics and freedom are identical, and wherever this kind of freedom does not exist, there is no political space in the true sense. On the other hand, the means by which one can establish a political space and defend its existence are neither always nor necessarily political means. The means used to form and maintain a political space were definitely not regarded by the Greeks, for example, as legitimately political—that is, as constituting a kind of action contained in the essence of the polis. They believed that the establishment of the polis requires a lawgiving act, but this lawgiver was not a citizen of the polis, and what he did was definitely not "political." They likewise believed that whenever the polis dealt with other states, it no longer actually needed to proceed politically, but could instead use force—whether that was because its continuation was threatened by the power of another community or because it wished to make others subservient to it. In other words, what we today call "foreign policy" was not really politics for the Greeks in any real sense. We shall return to this issue later. What is crucial for us

*In Greek, *idion* means private, one's own, peculiar.—Ed.

here is to understand freedom itself as political and not as a purpose, possibly the highest, to be obtained by political means, and to realize that coercion and brute force are always means for protecting or establishing or expanding political space, but in and of themselves are definitely not political. They are phenomena peripheral to politics and therefore not politics itself.

Political space as such realizes and guarantees both the freedom of all citizens and the reality discussed and attested to by the many. But if we seek a meaning beyond the political realm, we can do so only if, like the philosophers of the polis, we choose to interact with the few rather than with the many and become convinced that speaking freely with others about something produces not reality but deception, not truth but lies.

Parmenides appears to have been the first to take this view, and the crucial factor for him was not, for instance, that he separated the many bad people from the few and best, as Heraclitus did and as was typified in the spirit of the agon, which marked all of Greek political life, demanding that each man constantly strive to be the best. But Parmenides differentiated between a path of truth, which stands open only to the individual as an individual, and paths of deception traveled by everyone who is under way with his fellows for whatever purpose. Plato followed him in this to a certain extent. But Plato's adoption of Parmenides here became politically significant precisely because, in founding the Academy, Plato did not insist on the individual, but rather took the fundamental idea of a few, who in turn could philosophize in free speech with one another, and made it a reality.

Plato, the father of political philosophy in the West, attempted in various ways to oppose the polis and what it understood by freedom by positing a political theory in which political standards were derived not from politics but from philosophy, by develop-

ing a detailed constitution whose laws correspond to ideas accessible only to the philosopher, and ultimately by influencing a ruler whom he hoped would realize such legislation—an attempt that nearly cost him his freedom and his life. Founding the Academy was another such attempt. This act stood in opposition to the polis because it set the Academy apart from the political arena, but at the same it was also done in the spirit of this specifically Greco-Athenian political space—that is, insofar as its substance lay in men speaking with one another. And with that there arose alongside the realm of political freedom a new space of freedom that has survived down to our own time as the freedom of the university and academic freedom. Although this freedom was created after the likeness of a freedom originally experienced politically, and was presumably understood by Plato as a possible core or starting point from which the communal life of the many was to be defined in the future, the de facto effect was the introduction of a new concept of freedom into the world. In contradistinction to a purely philosophical freedom valid only for the individual, for whom all things political are so remote that only the philosopher's body still resides in the polis, this freedom of the few is political by nature. The free space of the Academy was intended as a fully valid substitute for the marketplace, the agora, the central space for freedom in the polis. In order for their institution to succeed, the few had to demand that their activity, their speech with one another, be relieved of the activities of the polis in the same way the citizens of Athens were relieved of all activities that dealt with earning their daily bread. They had to be freed from politics in the Greek sense in order to be free for the space of academic freedom, just as the citizen had to be freed from earning the necessities of life in order to be free for politics. In order to enter the "academic" space, they had to leave the space of real politics, just as

citizens had to leave the privacy of their households to go to the marketplace. Just as liberation from work and the cares of life was a prerequisite for the freedom of the political man, liberation from politics was a prerequisite for the freedom of the academic.

It is in this context that we hear for the first time that politics is a necessity, that politics as a whole is merely a means to a higher end that lies outside of it, that it must therefore be justified in terms of such a defined end. What is striking here is that the parallel we have just described—by which it appears as if academic freedom simply takes the place of politics and as if the polis is related to the Academy in the same way the household is related to the polis—does not hold true. For the household (and the tasks performed in it to sustain life) was never justified as a means to an end—as if, to put it in Aristotelian terms, "life" per se is a means to the "good life" possible only in the polis. This was neither possible nor necessary, because the means/ends category has no application whatever within the realm of life per se. The purpose of life, and all activities of labor bound up with it, is obviously the sustaining of life itself, and the impulse behind the labor to sustain life does not lie outside of life, but is included in the life process, which forces us to labor just as it forces us to eat. If we want to understand the connection between household and polis in terms of ends and means, then life sustained within the household is not a means to the higher purpose of political freedom, but rather, control over the necessities of life and over slave labor within the household is the means by which a man is liberated to engage in politics.

And in fact, just such a liberation by domination—the liberation of the few, who enjoy the freedom to philosophize by ruling over the many—is what Plato proposed in the form of the philosopher-king, but his proposal has never been taken up by any

philosopher after him and has never had any political impact. The founding of the Academy, however—precisely because its primary aim was not training for a life of politics, as was the case in the schools of the Sophists and orators—has proved extraordinarily important for what we still understand by freedom today. Plato himself may have believed that the Academy would one day be able to conquer and rule the polis. The only issue of consequence to his successors, and to later philosophers, however, was that the Academy guaranteed to the few an institutionalized space for freedom, and from the outset this freedom was indeed understood over against the freedom of the marketplace. The world of mendacious opinions and deceptive speech was to be opposed by its counterpart, a world of truth and of speech compatible with truth, the art of rhetoric opposed by the science of dialectics. What prevailed and still defines our idea of academic freedom today is not Plato's hope of governing the polis from the Academy, of philosophy molding politics, but rather the turning away from the polis, an *a-politia*, so to speak, or indifference to politics.

The crucial point in this context is not so much the conflict between the polis and the philosophers, but the simple fact that this indifference of one realm toward the other, which seemed to offer a temporary resolution to the conflict, could not endure precisely because the space of the few and of their freedom, though likewise a public, nonprivate space, could not possibly fulfill the functions assigned to a political space, which included everyone who had the capacity to enjoy freedom. The few, wherever they have isolated themselves from the many—be it in the form of academic indifference or oligarchic rule—have manifestly ended up depending upon the many, particularly in all those matters of communal life requiring concrete action. Within the context of a

Platonic oligarchy, such a dependence can mean that the many are there to carry out the commands of the few—that is, to take upon themselves all real actions—in which case the dependence of the few is overcome by their own domination in the same way that rule over a household of slaves could allow a free man to overcome his dependence on the necessities of life by basing his freedom on brute force. Or, if the freedom of the few is purely academic in nature, then it manifestly depends upon the goodwill of the political body to guarantee that freedom. But in both cases politics no longer has anything to do with freedom and is therefore no longer political in the Greek sense. Instead, politics concerns itself with everything that guarantees the existence of freedom—that is, with administration and provision of life's necessities in peacetime and with defense in times of war. In that case, the sphere of freedom for the few not only has trouble maintaining itself over against the realm of politics, which is determined by the many, but also depends for its very existence upon the many. The simultaneous existence of the polis is of vital necessity for the academy, be it the Platonic version or the later university. The upshot, however, is that politics as a whole is obviously reduced to that lower level whose task was to sustain life within the public space of the polis. Politics becomes on the one hand a necessity that stands in opposition to freedom, and yet on the other hand is the prerequisite for freedom. At the same time those aspects of politics that were originally—that is, in the self-understanding of the polis—marginal phenomena now manifestly become central to the entire realm of politics. For the polis, providing for life's necessities and defending itself were not at the center of political life but were political only in the real sense of the word, that is, to the extent that decisions concerning them were not decreed from on high but decided by people talking with

and persuading one another. But that was precisely what no longer mattered once the justification for politics was seen as guaranteeing freedom for the few. What mattered was that those issues of existence over which the few had no control were all that was left to politics. Granted, some connection between politics and freedom is preserved, but the two are only connected, not equated. Freedom as the end purpose of politics establishes limits to the realm of politics; the criterion for action within that realm is no longer freedom but competence and efficiency in securing life's necessities.

The degradation of politics at the hands of philosophy, familiar since the days of Plato and Aristotle, depends entirely on the separation of the many from the few. This has had a quite extraordinary effect, demonstrable down to our own time, on all theoretical answers to the question about the meaning of politics. Politically, however, all it has achieved is the *a-politia* of the philosophical schools in antiquity and the academic freedom of our universities. In other words, its political impact has always been limited to those few for whom the authentic philosophical experience, in all its overwhelming urgency, has been the overriding issue—an experience that by its very nature leads us away from the political realm of living and speaking with one another.

But this theoretical effect did not mark the end of things; indeed, also down to our own time the notion has prevailed in the way both the political realm and politicians define themselves—that politics is and must be justified by end purposes that lie above and beyond politics, even though these end purposes have, of course, become considerably more shabby over time. Behind this notion lies Christianity's rejection and redefinition of politics, which although it superficially resembles the Platonic degradation of politics, is in fact far more radical and has assumed far different

forms. At first glance it may appear as if early Christianity simply demanded that this same, as it were, academic freedom from politics that the classical schools had claimed for themselves be applicable to everyone. And this impression is reinforced when we consider that its rejection of the public, political realm went hand in hand with the founding of a new space set apart from the existent political space, where the faithful came together first as a congregation and then as a church. This parallelism became fully realized, however, only with the rise of the secularized state, in which, to be sure, academic and religious freedom are closely linked, insofar as the public political body legally guarantees freedom from politics to them both. As long as one understands politics to be solely concerned with what is absolutely necessary for men to live in a community so that they then can be granted, either as individuals or in social groups, a freedom that lies beyond both politics and life's necessities, we are indeed justified in measuring the degree of freedom within any political body by the religious and academic freedom that it tolerates, which is to say, by the size of the nonpolitical space for freedom that it contains and maintains.

The direct political consequences of freedom from politics, from which academic freedom has profited so greatly, can be traced to other—and in terms of politics, far more radical—experiences than those of the philosophers. For Christians, the point was not that a space for the few should be established over against a space for the many, or a space for everyone be founded in opposition to the authorized space, but rather that a public space per se, whether for the few or the many, was intolerable because it was public. When Tertullian says that "nothing is more alien to us Christians than what matters publicly" (*Apologeticus,* 38), the emphasis is definitely on "public." We are accustomed, and

rightly so, to understand the early Christian refusal to participate in public affairs either from the Roman perspective of a divinity who rivals the gods of Rome or from the Christian viewpoint of an eschatological expectation that is relieved of all concern for this world. But that means we fail to see the actual antipolitical thrust of the Christian message and its underlying experience of what is essential for human communal life. There is no question that in the preaching of Jesus the ideal of goodness plays the same role as the ideal of wisdom in the teaching of Socrates. Jesus rejects being called "good" by his disciples, in the same way that Socrates refuses to be called "wise" by his pupils. It is the nature of goodness, however, that it must hide itself, that it may not appear in the world as what it is. A community of people that seriously believes that all human affairs should be managed according to goodness; that is therefore not afraid at least to attempt to love its enemies and repay evil with good; that, in other words, considers the ideal of holiness to be its standard of behavior, not only to save their individual souls by turning away from mankind, but also to manage human affairs—such a community has no choice but to retreat from the public arena and avoid its spotlight. It has to do its work in hiding, because to be seen and heard inevitably takes on the glow of appearance in which all holiness—no matter how hard it tries not to—instantly becomes hypocrisy.

Unlike the retreat of philosophers from politics, early Christians did not turn away from politics in order to withdraw entirely from the realm of human affairs. Such a retreat, which in the first centuries after Christ found the most extreme forms of the hermit's life perfectly acceptable, would have been a blatant contradiction to the preaching of Jesus and was considered heretical by the early Church. What happened instead was that the Christian message prescribed a manner of life in which human affairs were

withdrawn entirely from the public arena and transferred to a personal realm between one man and another. The historical situation was such that, since this interpersonal realm stood in apparent opposition to the public-political arena, it was equated and perhaps confused with privacy. Throughout all Greco-Roman antiquity, privacy was understood as the sole alternative to the public arena, whereby the deciding factor for both spaces was the contrast between what one wanted to show to the world by allowing it to appear in public and what could exist only in seclusion and therefore had to remain hidden. Politically, the crucial factor was that Christianity sought out such seclusion and from within that seclusion claimed control of what had formerly been public matters. For Christians do not content themselves with performing charitable deeds that go beyond politics; they explicitly assert that they "practice justice," and in both the Jewish and the early Christian views, the giving of alms is a matter of justice rather than of charity—except that such acts must not appear before the eyes of men, cannot be seen by them, indeed they must remain so hidden that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing—that is, the actor is barred from beholding his own deed (Matthew 6:1 ff).

In discussing these issues, we need not explore in detail how in the course of history the consciously and radically antipolitical character of Christianity could be successfully transformed so as to make a kind of Christian politics possible. This was—apart from the historical necessity that accompanied the collapse of the Roman Empire—the work of one man, Augustine, precisely because an extraordinary tradition of Roman thought still lived on in him. The reinterpretation of politics that took place here is of crucial importance for the entire tradition of Western civilization, and not only for the tradition of theory and thought,

but also for the framework in which real political history then took place. Not until Augustine did the body politic itself accept the view that politics is a means to some higher end and that freedom is an issue within politics only to the extent that there are certain areas that politics should release from its control. Now, however, freedom from politics is no longer a matter for the few, but instead a matter for the many, who neither should nor need concern themselves with the affairs of government, while at the same time the burden is placed upon the few to concern themselves with the necessary political ordering of human affairs. But this burden or onus does not, as with Plato and the philosophers, spring from the fundamental human condition of plurality, which binds the few to the many, the individual to everyone else. On the contrary, this plurality is affirmed, and the motive that compels the few to take up the burden of governing is not fear of being dominated by others worse than themselves. Augustine explicitly demands that the life of the saints unfold within a "society," and in coining the idea of a *civitas Dei*, a state of God, he assumes that human life is also politically determined by nonearthly conditions—although he leaves open the question of whether political matters will still be an onus in the world beyond. In any case, the motive for assuming the burden of earthly politics is love of one's neighbor, not fear of him.

This transformation of Christianity brought about by the thinking and actions of Augustine is what ultimately put the Church in the position to secularize the Christian flight into seclusion, to a point where the faithful constituted within the world a totally new, religiously defined public space, which, although public, was not political. The public nature of this space of the faithful—the only one in which, throughout the Middle Ages, it was possible to accommodate specifically political human needs—

was always ambiguous. It was primarily a space for assembly, and that means not simply a building in which men assemble, but also a space built for the express purpose of gathering people together. But as such, if the true content of the Christian message was to be preserved, it dared not be a space for appearance, for display. It proved almost impossible to prevent this, since any public space, which is constituted by an assembly of many people, will by its very nature establish itself as a space for display. Christian politics has always faced a twofold task: first, of making certain that even as it influences secular politics, the nonpolitical space where the faithful gather is itself secure from outside influence; and second, of preventing its place of assembly from becoming a place of display and thus turning the church into one more secular, worldly power among others. In the process, it turned out that this state of being bound to the world, which is part and parcel of any physical space and allows for both appearance and display, is far more difficult to combat than any secular claim to power coming from outside. For when the Reformation finally succeeded in removing everything connected with appearance and display from its churches, turning them into places of assembly for those who lived in seclusion from the world in the spirit of the Gospel, the public character of these ecclesiastical spaces disappeared as well. Even if the secularization of all public life had not followed in the wake of the Reformation, which is often regarded as having been its pacemaker, and even if as a result of this secularization religion had not become a private matter, the Protestant church would always have been hard-pressed to take on the task of supplying a substitute for classical citizenship—a task that the Catholic Church most certainly managed for several centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Whatever we may say about such hypothetical possibilities and

alternatives, the decisive point is that with the end of the classical period and the establishment of an ecclesiastical public space, secular politics remained tied both to those necessities of life that come from man's living in community and to the protection offered by a higher realm, which until the end of the Middle Ages remained tangibly, spatially present in the existence of churches. The Church needed politics, both the worldly politics of secular powers and religiously oriented politics within its own ecclesiastical realm, in order to be able to maintain itself on earth and assert itself in this world—that is, as the visible Church, in contrast to the invisible, whose existence, being solely a matter of faith, was entirely untouched by politics. And politics needed the Church—not just religion, but also the tangible, spatial existence of religious institutions—in order to prove its higher justification and legitimation. What changed with the advent of the modern era was not a change in the actual function of politics; it was not that politics was suddenly assigned a new dignity peculiar to it. What changed was the arenas for which politics seemed necessary. The religious realm sank back into the private sphere, while the realm of life and its necessities, which both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages was considered the private sphere par excellence, now attained a new dignity and thrust itself into the public arena in the form of society.

Here we must make a political distinction between the egalitarian democracy of the nineteenth century—for which the participation of all in government, whatever its form might be, is a categorical sign of a people's freedom—and the enlightened despotism found at the beginning of the modern era, which believed that a people's "liberty and freedom consists in having the government of those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own: 'tis not for having share in Government, that is

nothing pertaining to them."* In both cases, the purpose of government, to whose field of activity politics is from here on assigned, is to protect the free productivity of the society and the security of the individual in his private life. Whatever the relationship between citizen and state, freedom and politics are definitely kept separate, and being free in the sense of a positive, freely unfolding activity is now confined to a realm that deals with things that by nature cannot possibly be held in common by all, namely, with life and property, with those things that are most specifically our own. The new phenomenon of a societal space and of social, nonindividual productive energies enormously enlarged this sphere of personal ownership, the sphere of the *idion*—in which the Greeks thought it "idiotically" stupid for anyone to spend his time. This, however, in no way changes the fact that the activities required for sustaining life and property, or indeed for improving life and augmenting property, are matters of necessity and not of freedom. What the modern era expected of its state, and what this state indeed achieved to a large extent, was the release of men to develop their socially productive energies, to produce in common the goods they required for a "happy" life.

This modern conception of politics, in which the state is seen as a function of society or a necessary evil for the sake of social freedom, has prevailed in both theory and practice over the entirely different notion of a people's or a nation's sovereignty which is inspired by antiquity and which has emerged over and over again in all the revolutions of the modern era. Only in such revolutions, from the American and French in the eighteenth century down to the Hungarian Revolution of the recent past, was there a direct link between the idea of participating in govern-

*As King Charles I of England put it before being beheaded.—Ed.

ment and the idea of being free. But, at least thus far, these revolutions—and the direct experiences they provided of the possibilities inherent in political action—have proved incapable of establishing a new form of state. Ever since the rise of the nation-state, the prevailing opinion has been that it is the duty of the government to defend a society's freedom against internal and external enemies, with force if necessary. Participation by citizens in the government, whatever its form, has been thought necessary for freedom only because the state, since it must necessarily have the means of force at its disposal, must be controlled by the governed in its employment of that force. There is also the additional insight that power is generated with the establishment of a sphere of political action, whatever its defined limits, and that freedom can protect itself only by constantly watching over the exercise of such power. What we today understand by a constitutional government, be it monarchy or republic, is essentially a government controlled by the governed and limited in its powers and use of force. There is no question that such limits and controls exist in the name of freedom, for both the society and the individual. The idea is to limit the sphere of government as far as is possible and necessary in order to realize freedom beyond the reach of government. The point is not so much, or at least not primarily, to make possible the freedom to act and to be politically active. These remain the prerogative of government and of the professional politicians who offer themselves, through the roundabout way of the party system, to the people as their deputies, and who represent the people's interests within the state and, if occasion arises, against it. In other words, even in the modern era the relation between politics and freedom is taken to mean that politics is a means and freedom its highest end. The relation itself has not changed, although the content and extent of freedom have under-

gone extraordinary change. This is why the question as to the meaning of politics is generally answered today in categories and concepts that are unusually old and for that reason perhaps unusually esteemed. And this despite the fact that the modern era differs just as decisively from all previous eras in its political aspect as in its intellectual or material ones. The simple fact of the emancipation of women and of the working class—that is, of segments of humanity never before allowed to show themselves in public life—puts a radically new face on all political questions.

As for the definition of politics as a means to an end that lies outside of it—that is, to freedom—it applies only to a very limited degree in the modern era, even though it is mentioned time and again. Of all the modern answers to the question of the meaning of politics, it is the one that remains most closely linked to the tradition of Western political philosophy; and in the context of reflection on the nation-state, it reveals itself most clearly in a principle first identified by Ranke but fundamental to all nation-states: the primacy of foreign policy. But far more characteristic of the egalitarian character of modern governmental forms and of the emancipation of workers and women—in which their most revolutionary aspect is expressed in political terms—is a definition of the state based on the primacy of domestic policy, according to which "the state, as the proprietor of force, [is] an indispensable institution of life for society" (Theodor Eschenburg, *Staat und Gesellschaft in Deutschland,* p. 19). Although, to be sure, the proponents of these two views—that the state and politics are institutions indispensable to freedom, and that they are institutions indispensable to life—are scarcely aware of it, the two theories stand in unbridgeable opposition to each other. It makes a huge difference whether freedom or life is posited as the highest of all goods—as the standard by which all political action is

guided and judged. If we think of politics by its very nature, and despite all its permutations, as having arisen out of the polis and being still under its charge, then the linkage of politics and life results in an inner contradiction that cancels and destroys what is specifically political about politics.

This contradiction finds its most obvious expression in the fact that it has always been the prerogative of politics to demand of those engaged in it that under certain circumstances they must sacrifice their lives. One can of course also understand this demand in the sense of the individual being called upon to sacrifice his life for the ongoing life of society, and indeed it does exists within a context that at least sets a limit to our risking our lives: No one can or may risk his life if in doing so he risks the life of humanity. We will return to this connection, of which we have become fully aware only because never before have we had at our disposal the possibility of putting an end both to humanity and to all organic life. There is in fact hardly a single political category or a single political concept that has been passed down to us that, when measured against this latest possibility, does not prove to be theoretically obsolete and practically inapplicable, precisely because in a certain sense what is now at issue for the first time in foreign policy is life itself, the survival of humankind.

By linking freedom to the very survival of humankind, we do not, however, get rid of the antithesis between freedom and life, the spark that first ignited all politics and is still the measure for all specifically political virtue. We might even assert, with considerable justification, that the fact that contemporary politics is concerned with the naked existence of us all is itself the clearest sign of the disastrous state in which the world finds itself—a disaster that, along with all the rest, threatens to rid the world of politics. For the danger imposed upon anyone venturing into politics—

where, if everything is proceeding as it should, his own life is the last thing he need worry about—does not entail the life of the society or nation or people for whom he may have to sacrifice his own. The only thing in danger is freedom, both his own and that of the group to which the individual belongs, and with it, the security of a stable world in which this group or nation lives and that the labor of generations has built in order to provide a reliable and enduring home for all action and speech, which are the real political activities. Under normal conditions, that is, under those that have prevailed in Europe since Roman antiquity, war was indeed the continuation of politics by other means, and that meant that it could always be avoided if one of the opponents decided to accept the demands of the other. That acceptance might well be at the cost of freedom, but not of life.

As we all know, such conditions no longer exist today. When we look back on them, they seem a version of paradise lost. Even if the world we live in cannot be causally derived from the modern period or seen as an automatic process inherent in it, our world has nevertheless grown out of the soil of modernity. In political terms, this means that both domestic politics, for which the highest end was life itself, and foreign policy, which oriented itself on freedom as its highest good, saw their real substance in the use of brute force and actions that employed such force. Ultimately, the crucial issue was that the state organized itself as the "possessor of force"—regardless of whether the ultimate purpose of that force was determined by life or by freedom. The question of the meaning of politics today, however, concerns the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the public means of force used for such ends. What ignites that question is the simple fact that brute force, which is supposed to safeguard life and freedom, has become so monstrously powerful that it threatens not only

freedom but life as well. It has become evident that it is the brute force of nations that puts into question the life process of all humanity, and as a result the already highly dubious answer that the modern world provided as to the meaning of politics has itself become doubly questionable.

The monstrous growth of the means of force and destruction was possible not only because of technological inventions, but also because political, public space had itself become an arena of force both in the modern world's theoretical self-perception and in its brutal reality. This alone made it possible for technological progress to become primarily progress in the possibilities of mutual mass destruction. Since power arises wherever people act in concert, and since people's concerted actions occur essentially in the political arena, the potential power inherent in all human affairs has made itself felt in a space dominated by force. As a result, power and force appear to be identical, and under modern conditions, that is indeed largely the case. But in terms of their origins and intrinsic meaning, power and force are not identical, but in a certain sense opposites. Wherever force, which is actually a phenomenon of the individual or the few, is combined with power, which is possible only among the many, the result is a monstrous increase in potential force: Though derived from the power of an organized space, it, like every potential force, grows and develops at the expense of power.

Ever since the invention of atomic weapons, the foremost political issue of our time has been the question as to what role force should have in international affairs and/or how the employment of the means of force can be excluded from international affairs. But the phenomenon of force predominating at the expense of all other political factors is older; it first appeared in World War I, with its huge mechanized battles on the western

front. It should be noted that this disastrous new role for force, which developed automatically out of itself and constantly grew among all participants, caught unprepared nations, politicians, and public opinion totally by surprise. And in fact the growth of force in the public, governmental sphere had, so to speak, taken place behind the backs of those acting in that sphere—during a century that might be counted among the most peaceful or, let us say, least violent in history. It was not without good reason that the modern world—which with greater determination than ever before regarded politics as only a means to the preservation and promotion of a society's life and therefore strove to reduce political prerogatives to an essential minimum—came to believe, not unjustifiably, that it could deal with the problem of force better than all previous centuries. What it in fact achieved was the almost total exclusion of brute force, of the immediate domination of man over man, from the constantly expanding sphere of social life. The emancipation of the working class and of women—the two categories of human beings who had been subject to force throughout premodern history—clearly represents the high point of this development.

For now let us set aside the question whether this decrease in brute force in the life of society is in reality to be equated with a gain in human freedom. In terms of our political tradition, in any case, not being free can mean one of two things. It occurs first when a person is subject to the force of another, but it also occurs, indeed in the more original sense, when a person is subject to life's naked necessities. Labor is the activity that corresponds to the coercion by which life itself forces us to provide ourselves with these necessities. In all premodern societies, a person could free himself from this labor by coercing others to labor for him, that is, by force and domination. In modern society, the laborer

is subject to no brute force and no domination; he is coerced by the direct necessity inherent in life itself. Here, then, necessity replaces force, but the question remains: Is it easier to resist the coercion of brute force or of necessity? Moreover, the overall development of society—at least until it reaches the point where automation truly does away with labor—is moving uniformly toward making all its members "laborers," human beings whose activity, whatever it may be, primarily serves to provide life's necessities. In this sense, too, the exclusion of brute force from the life of society has for now resulted only in leaving an incomparably larger space than ever before to the necessity life imposes on everyone. Necessity, not freedom, rules the life of society; and it is not by chance that the concept of necessity has come to dominate all modern philosophies of history, where modern thought has sought to find its philosophical orientation and self-understanding.

This displacement of force from both the private space of the household and the semipublic sphere of society was undertaken quite consciously. In order for people to exist without force in daily life, there had to be an increase in the force employed by the public hand, by the state, whose use of force, so it was believed, could be kept under control since it had been explicitly defined as a mere means toward the greater end of the life of society, of the free development of productive energies. It never occurred to the modern mind that the means of brute force could themselves become "productive"—that is, that they could grow in the same way (and to an even greater extent) than other productive energies in society—because the real sphere of productivity was associated with society and not the state. By its nature the state was considered an unproductive and, in extreme cases, parasitical phenomenon. Precisely because force had been limited

to the realm of the state, which in constitutional governments was subject to the control of society through the party system, it was believed that force had been reduced to a minimum that would remain constant.

We know that just the opposite was the case. The epoch regarded as historically the most peaceful and least violent led directly to the greatest, most horrendous development of the means of force. This only appears to be a paradox. What no one had reckoned with was the specific combination of force and power that could arise only in the public realm of the state, because only there do men come together and generate power. It makes no difference how narrowly one defines the prerogatives of this realm, how precisely a constitution and other controls set limits to it; the fact that it is a public, political arena generates power; and this power must, of course, end in disaster if, as in modern times, it is focused almost exclusively on brute force, since this same force has been transferred out of the private sphere of the individual and into the public sphere of the many. However absolute the force that the master of a household in premodern times might have exercised over his family, defined in the largest sense—and it was certainly great enough to label such a household a despotic regime in the full sense of the term—this force was nonetheless always limited to the individual who exercised it. It was a thoroughly impotent force that remained sterile in terms of both economics and politics. However disastrous the exercise of such force was for those subjected to it within a household, the means of force could of themselves never flourish under such conditions. They could not become a danger to all, because there was no monopoly on force.

We observed that the notion that politics is a realm of means, whose ends and standards have to be sought outside it, is

extremely old and venerable. Nonetheless what we are dealing with here and what has become so dubious about recent developments are those very same notions, which, although originally borderline issues peripheral to politics—that is, the brute force sometimes necessary for the defense of politics and those provisions for sustaining life that must first be secured before political freedom is possible—have now moved to the center of all political activity by applying force as the means whose highest end is supposed to be sustaining and organizing life. The crisis lies in the fact that the political arena now threatens precisely what once appeared to be its sole justification. In this situation, the question about the meaning of politics is itself altered. The question today is hardly, What is the meaning of politics? For those people all over the world who feel threatened by politics, among whom the very best are those who consciously distance themselves from politics, the far more relevant question they ask themselves and others is, Does politics still have any meaning at all?

Underlying these questions are the views, briefly sketched above, concerning what politics really is. These views have hardly changed over the course of many centuries. The only real change is that what was originally the substance of judgments based on certain immediate and legitimate experiences—for example, the judgment and condemnation of politics on the basis of the experience of the philosopher or the Christian, but also the correction of such judgments and a limited justification of politics—evolved long ago into prejudices. Prejudices have come to play an increasingly large and legitimate role in the political, public arena. They are a reflection of those things we all automatically share with one another but no longer make judgments about because we no longer have any real opportunity to experience them directly. All such prejudices, to the extent that they are legitimate and not just

mere small talk, are judgments formed in the past. No one can live without them because a life completely free of prejudice would demand a superhuman alertness, a constant readiness to confront and be confronted by the totality of the real world at every moment, as if every day were the first day or Last Day of creation. Prejudices and stupid chatter are not the same thing. Precisely because prejudices always have an inherent legitimacy, one may actually risk confronting them only if they no longer fulfill their function, and that means only when they are no longer suitable for relieving the person making a judgment from the burden of some portion of reality. But it is precisely at that point, when prejudices come into conflict with reality, that they start to become dangerous, and people, who no longer feel protected by them in their thinking, begin to embellish them and turn them into the basis of that sort of perversion of theory that we commonly call "ideologies" or "worldviews." It never does any good to oppose an ideology derived from prejudice with some current antithetical worldview. The only thing that helps is to attempt to replace prejudices with judgments. In doing so, we are inevitably led back to the judgments contained in prejudices and, in turn, to the experiences which are contained within them and from which they first sprang.

In our current crisis, the prejudices that stand in the way of a theoretical understanding of what politics is really about involve nearly all the political categories in which we are accustomed to think, but above all they pertain to the means/end category that regards politics in terms of an end purpose lying outside of politics, as well as to the notion that the substance of politics is brute force and, finally, to the conviction that domination is the central concept of all political theory. All these judgments and prejudices arise from a mistrust of politics that most certainly is not unjusti-

fied. But in our present prejudice against politics, this ancient mistrust has been transformed yet again. Ever since the invention of the atomic bomb, our mistrust has been based on the eminently justifiable fear that politics and the means of force available to it may well destroy humanity. Out of this fear arises the hope that men will come to their senses and rid the world of politics instead of humankind. And this hope is no less justifiable than the fear. For the notion that politics exists always and everywhere human beings exist is itself a prejudice, and the socialist ideal of a stateless—and for Marx that means a politics-less—final condition for humanity is not at all utopian. It is simply appalling. Unfortunately, Marx was a much better historian than theoretician, and in his theories he often simply expressed and put into sharper conceptual focus historical tendencies that could be objectively demonstrated. The atrophy of the political realm is one of those objectively demonstrable tendencies of the modern era.

It lies in the nature of our subject—where we always deal with the many and the world that arises between them—that our discussion ought never to neglect public opinion. According to public opinion, however, the question about the meaning of politics today has been enkindled by the threat that war and atomic weapons represent for humankind. And so it is only logical that we continue our discussion with a reflection on the question of war.

The Question of War

When the first atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, preparing the way for an unexpectedly quick end to World War II, a wave of horror passed over the world. At the time, no one could know just how justifiable that horror was, for by leveling an entire city one atomic bomb accomplished in only a few minutes what the systematic deployment of massive air attacks would have taken

weeks or months to do. The bombardment of Coventry made it clear to experts, and the massive bomb attacks on German cities made it clear to the entire world, that once again, just as in the ancient world, war could not only decimate a people but also turn the world they inhabit into a desert. Germany was already in ruins, its capital city a heap of rubble, but within the framework of modern warfare and thus in the sphere of human or, better, interhuman affairs, which is what politics is about, the atomic bomb of World War II was—though it represented something absolutely new in the history of science—nothing more than a culminating point, achieved, so to speak, by one short jump or short circuit, toward which events in any case had been moving at an ever accelerating pace.

The use of the means of force to destroy the world and annihilate human life is, moreover, neither new nor horrifying, and the people who have always believed that a categorical condemnation of force ultimately amounts to a condemnation of politics in general have ceased to be correct only in the last few years, or, more precisely, since the invention of the hydrogen bomb. In the destruction of the world, nothing is destroyed except a structure made by human hands, and the brute force required for it corresponds precisely to the violence necessarily inherent in all human productive processes. The means of force needed for destruction are, as it were, made in the likeness of the tools of production, and the technical instrumentarium of every age includes both. What men produce can in turn be destroyed by men; what they destroy can be rebuilt. The ability to destroy and the ability to produce stand in balance, one with the other. The energy which destroys the world and does violence to it is the same energy that is in our own hands and by means of which we do violence to nature and destroy some natural thing—a tree, for instance, to supply us

with wood and to make something wooden from—in order to build our world.

The proposition that the ability to destroy and the ability to produce stand in balance is not, however, unconditional. It is valid only for what is produced by men, not for the less tangible but no less real realm of human relationships that arise from action in the broadest sense of the term. We will return to this later. The crucial point for our present situation is that in the real world of things, the balance between destruction and reconstruction can be maintained only as long as the technology involved deals with nothing except pure production; since the discovery of atomic energy, this is no longer the case, even though for the most part we still live in a world defined by the industrial revolution. But even in this man-made world we are no longer dealing solely with natural things that reappear transformed into one thing or another, but also with natural processes created by human beings in imitation of nature and introduced directly into the human world. It is characteristic of these processes that, like the process in an internal combustion engine, they occur primarily in the form of explosions, which in historical terms means in the form of catastrophes, whereby each such explosion or catastrophe drives the process itself forward. In almost every aspect of our lives today, we find ourselves in just such a process, in which explosions and catastrophes do not result in our doom but rather constitute an unceasing progress driven by those same explosions—though in this context we shall disregard for now the ambiguous value of this sort of progress. In terms of politics, such progress can perhaps be best grasped by considering how Germany's catastrophic defeat has played an essential role in making Germany the most modern and advanced country in Europe today, whereas other countries lag behind, either because they are not shaped so

entirely by technology as America, where the pace of the production and consumption process makes catastrophes superfluous, or because they have not gone through the palpable destruction that France, for example, experienced. This modern technology and the process into which it has drawn the human world does not disrupt the balance between production and destruction. On the contrary, it appears as if these closely related capacities have become more inextricably intertwined in the process, so that production and destruction, even when conducted on a grand scale, ultimately prove to be two different but almost indistinguishable phases of the same ongoing process in which—to take an everyday example—the tearing down of one house is merely the first stage of building another, and even the construction of a new house, given its carefully calculated life expectancy, can already be construed as part of an unending process of tearing down and building anew.

It has often been doubted, and to some extent justly so, whether men living in the midst of such a process, which they themselves have unleashed and which inevitably leads to catastrophe even as it progresses, can remain lords and masters of the world they have built and the human affairs that are part of it. Above all, the dismaying thing about all this is the rise of totalitarian ideologies in which man sees himself as the exponent of the catastrophic process he has unleashed, his essential function now being to serve this advancing process and assist in its acceleration. But despite this disquieting correspondence, we should never forget that these are only ideologies and that even the energies of nature that man has bent to his service are still calculated in horsepower, that is, in units based in nature and taken directly from his environment. Man's success in exploiting nature to increase his own strength twofold or even a hundredfold can be regarded as a

rape of nature, at least if one shares the biblical view that man was created to care for and serve the earth, and not to force it into his service. But quite apart from who is serving whom, or who is destined for service by divine decree, it cannot be denied that man's energy, whether put to use in production or labor, is a natural phenomenon; that brute force exists as a possibility within this energy and is itself natural; and finally that man, as long as he is dealing only with natural forces, remains in an earthly, natural realm to which both his own strength and he, as an organic being, belong. Nothing of this is changed by the fact that he uses his own strength together with energies taken from nature to produce a world that is thoroughly nonnatural—that is, something that by "natural" means would never have come into being without him. Or, put another way: As long as the abilities to produce and destroy stand in balance, everything proceeds more or less as it always has, and what totalitarian ideologies have to say about the enslavement of man to the process he has unleashed is, when all is said and done, a specter that is countered by the fact that men are the lords of the world they have built and are still masters of the destructive potential they have created.

A change in all this was possible only with the discovery of atomic energy or, better, with the invention of a technology driven by the processes of nuclear energy, for it is not natural processes that are unleashed here. Instead, processes that do not occur naturally on earth are brought to earth to produce a world or destroy it. These processes themselves come from the universe surrounding the earth, and in bringing them under his control, man is here no longer acting as a natural organic being but rather as a being capable of finding its way about in the universe, despite the fact that it can live only under conditions provided by earth and its nature. These universal energies cannot be measured in

horsepower or by any other natural yardstick, and since they are of a nonearthly nature, they can destroy nature on earth in the same way that natural processes manipulated by men can destroy the world built by men. The horror that swept over mankind when it learned about the first atomic bomb was a horror of an energy that came from the universe and is supernatural in the truest sense of the word. The scope of the devastation to buildings and boulevards, even the number of human lives destroyed, was relevant only because, in unleashing death and destruction on so vast a scale, this newly discovered source of energy had eerily impressive symbolic power from the very moment of its birth.

This horror very quickly became mixed with and was soon overshadowed by a no less justified—and at that point far more appropriate—outrage at the fact that this new weapon, whose superiority was still absolute at the time, was tested on populous cities, whereas it could just as well, and with no less political effect, have been exploded by way of demonstration in the desert or on some uninhabited island. This outrage also anticipated in part something that we now know to be the monstrous truth, something no longer denied by the general staff of any major power: namely, that once a war has broken out, it will inevitably be fought with whatever weapons the warring parties have at their disposal. This is a given only if the goal of war is no longer limited, if it ends not in a peace treaty between warring governments, but rather in a victory whose aim is the total political or even physical destruction of the enemy. This possibility was merely hinted at in World War II. It was implicit in the demand that Germany and Japan surrender unconditionally, but it was first realized in all its terribleness when the atomic bombs dropped on Japan suddenly demonstrated to the entire world that threats of total destruction were not just empty words but that the means for

carrying them out were indeed in hand. Surely no one now doubts that, as the logical outcome of such possibilities, a third world war can hardly end in anything but the annihilation of the loser. We are already so in the thrall of total war that we can scarcely imagine a war between Russia and America in which the American Constitution or the current Russian regime would survive defeat.* But that means that a future war will not be about a gain or loss of power, about borders, export markets, or *Lebensraum*, that is, about things that can also be achieved by means of political discussion and without the use of force. It means that war has now ceased to be the *ultima ratio* of negotiations, whereby the goals of a war were determined at the point where negotiations broke off, so that all ensuing military actions really were nothing but a continuation of politics by other means. What is now at stake is something that could, of course, never be a matter for negotiation: the sheer existence of a nation and its people. It is at this point—when war no longer presumes the coexistence of hostile parties as a given and no longer seeks simply to put an end to the conflict between them by force—that war first truly ceases to be a means of politics and, as a war of annihilation, begins to overstep the bounds set by politics and to annihilate politics itself.

This concept of what is now called "total war" originated, as we know, in those totalitarian regimes with which it is inextricably linked; a war of annihilation is the only war appropriate to a totalitarian system. Total war was first proclaimed by nations under totalitarian rule, but in doing so they inevitably forced their own principle of action onto the nontotalitarian world. Once a principle of such vast scope enters the world, it is of course prac-

*When Arendt wrote this, the threat of war between the United States and the Soviet Union was grave.—Ed.

tically impossible to limit it, for instance, to a conflict between totalitarian and nontotalitarian nations. This became clear when the atomic bomb, which was originally produced as a weapon against Hitler's Germany, was dropped on Japan. A cause of outrage, though not the sole cause, was that although Japan was indeed an imperialist power, it was not a totalitarian regime.

Common both to a horror that extended beyond all political or moral considerations and to an outrage that was itself an immediate political and moral reaction was the realization of what total war actually means and the awareness that total war was now a fait accompli, not only for countries under totalitarian rule and the conflicts they had brought about, but also for the whole world. The extermination of entire peoples and the razing of entire civilizations—which, because such things no longer occurred at the heart of the civilized world, had seemed impossible both in principle since the days of the Romans and de facto over the last three or four centuries of the modern era—had at one fell swoop thrust themselves back into the ominous realm of the all-too-possible. And although it arose as a response to a totalitarian threat—insofar as surely not one of these scientists would have thought of producing an atomic bomb if he had not feared that Hitler's Germany might produce and use the bomb—this possibility had instantly become a reality that had hardly anything to do with what had called it into existence.

Here, for perhaps the first time in the modern era though hardly in recorded and remembered history, the limits inherent in violent action had been overstepped—limits that declared that the destruction brought about by brute force must always be only partial, affecting only certain portions of the world and taking only a certain number, however that number might be determined, of human lives, but never annihilating a whole nation or a

whole people. But it has happened often enough in history that the world of an entire people has been leveled, the walls of its city razed, the men slain, and the rest of the population sold into slavery, and only over the last centuries of the modern era have people wanted to believe that such things could no longer occur. We have always more or less explicitly known that this was one of the few mortal sins of politics. This mortal sin, or, less loftily, this overstepping of the limits inherent in violent action, consists of two things. First, murder is no longer about a larger or smaller number of people who must die in any case, but rather about a whole people and its political constitution, both of which harbor the possibility—and in the constitution's case, the intention—of being immortal. Second, and closely linked to the first point, violence is applied here not only to things that have been produced, which also arose by means of force at some point and thus can be rebuilt by means of force, but also to a historical and political reality housed in this world of products, a reality that cannot be rebuilt because it is itself not a product. When a people loses its political freedom, it loses its political reality, even if it should succeed in surviving physically.

What perishes in this case is not a world resulting from production, but one of action and speech created by human relationships, a world that never comes to an end and that—though spun of the most ephemeral stuff, of fleeting words and quickly forgotten deeds—is of such incredible, enduring tenacity that under certain circumstances, as for example in the case of the Jewish people, it can outlive by centuries the loss of a palpable manufactured world. That, however, is the exception, and ordinarily this system of relationships established by action, in which the past lives on in the form of a history that goes on speaking and being spoken about, can exist only within the world produced by man, nesting

there in its stones until they too speak and in speaking bear witness, even if we must first dig them out of the earth. This entire truly human world, which in a narrower sense forms the political realm, can indeed be destroyed by brute force, but it did not arise from force, and its inherent destiny is not to perish by force.

This world of relationships most certainly does not arise out of the strength or energy of the individual, but rather out of the many, and it is out of their being together that power arises, a power that renders even the greatest individual strength powerless. This power can be weakened, just as it can be renewed, by all sorts of factors; it can be destroyed for good and all only by brute force, if that force is total and literally leaves no stone atop another, no human being alongside another. Both these possibilities are inherent in totalitarian rule, which is not satisfied with intimidating individuals at home but also uses systematic terror to destroy all inter-human relationships. This terror finds its equivalent in total war, which is not satisfied with destroying strategically important military targets, but sets out to destroy—because it now technologically can seek to destroy—the entire world that has arisen between human beings.

It would be relatively easy to prove that Western civilization's political theories and moral codes have always tried to exclude a war of annihilation from the arsenal of political tools; and it would presumably be easier still to show that such theories and demands have proved to be less than effectual. Oddly enough, it is to the nature of such things—which in the broadest sense concern the civilized behavior that man demands of himself—that something Plato once said does indeed apply: that poetry, together with the images and models it offers us, "educates our progeny by embellishing the thousand deeds of our ancestors" (*Phaedrus*, 245a). In the ancient world, at least in purely political terms, the

greatest subject for such pedagogical embellishments was the Trojan War, in whose victors the Greeks saw their ancestors and in whose vanquished the Romans saw theirs. And thus they became the "twin peoples" of antiquity, as Mommsen liked to call them, because the same single enterprise was held to be the beginning of their historical existence. And even today, the Greeks' war against Troy, which ended in such a total destruction of that city that until recent times it was possible to believe that it had never existed, can probably still be considered the ur-example of a war of annihilation.

Thus, in contemplating the political significance of the war of annihilation that once again threatens us, let us permit ourselves first to think about this most ancient of examples and its embellishments—above all because, in embellishing this war, both Greeks and Romans, sometimes in agreement on many levels but just as frequently in opposition, also defined—for themselves and thus to a certain extent for us—what politics actually means and what place it should have in history. First, then, it is of crucial importance that Homer's song does not pass over the vanquished man in silence, that it bears witness as much on behalf of Hector as of Achilles, and that, although both the Greeks' victory and Troy's defeat had been irrevocably preordained by the decree of the gods, that did not make Achilles the greater man or Hector the lesser man, or the Greeks' cause more just or Troy's self-defense less just. Homer celebrates this war of annihilation, already centuries old by his time, in such a way that, in a certain sense—that is, in the sense of poetical and historical recollection—he undoes that very annihilation. Homer's grand impartiality is not value-free objectivity in the modern sense, but rather a perfect freedom from particular interests and complete independence from the judgment of history, and, in contrast to history, he depends

on the judgment of those involved and of their concept of greatness. His impartiality stands at the beginning of all historiography and not just that of the West. For what we understand by history had never existed anywhere before, nor has any history been written since that is not influenced at least indirectly by the Homeric example. We find the same idea in Herodotus when he says that he wants to prevent "great and wondrous deeds, some performed by Hellenes, some by barbarians, from being relegated to oblivion" (I, i)—an idea that, as Burckhardt once correctly remarked, "would never have occurred to any Egyptian or Jew" (*Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, III, p. 406).

As we know only too well, the Greek effort to transform wars of annihilation into political wars never went any further than Homer's historical recollection and decidedly poetical rescue of those who were defeated and destroyed, and ultimately it was the inability to make such a transformation that led to the ruin of the Greek city-states. By defining the political in the way it did, the Greek polis chose a different path when it came to war. As we've seen, the Greeks formed the polis around the Homeric agora, the place where free men assembled and conversed, and by doing so centered what was truly "political"—that is, what belonged to the polis and was therefore denied to all barbarians and other unfree people—on this world of coming together, being together, speaking about something with one another; and they saw this entire arena under the sign of divine *Peithō*, the power to persuade and influence, which reigned among equals and determined all things without force or coercion. War, and the brute force it entailed, was, on the other hand, entirely excluded from what was truly political, which arose and had its validity among the citizens of the polis. In dealing with other states or city-states, the polis as a whole acted with force, and thus in its

own eyes acted "unpolitically." In consequence, and indeed of necessity, such military action invalidated the basic equality of citizens, who were neither rulers nor subjects. Because war cannot be waged without command and obedience, and because military decisions cannot be a matter of debate and persuasion, war belonged, as the Greeks saw it, in a nonpolitical sphere. Everything we understand as foreign policy belonged in that same sphere. Here, war is not the continuation of politics by other means, but just the opposite: negotiation and the conclusion of treaties are understood merely as a continuation of war by other means, the means of cunning and deception.

The impact of Homer on the development of the Greek polis did not exhaust itself, however, in what was really only a negative exclusion of force from the political arena, the consequence of which was simply that war continued to be waged as before according to the principle that the stronger does what he can and the weaker endures what he must (cf. Thucydides, v, "The Melian Dialogue"). The full Homeric effect of the poet's depiction of the Trojan War can be found in the way in which the polis incorporated the concept of struggle into its organizational form, not only as a legitimate pursuit, but also, in a certain sense, as the highest form of human communal activity. What is commonly called the agonistic spirit of the Greeks—and what doubtlessly helps us explain (if such things can ever be explained) the fact that within the few centuries of Greece's golden age we find a greater and more significant concentration of genius in every intellectual field than anywhere else in history—is by no means simply a striving to prove oneself always and everywhere the best, a subject about which Homer himself speaks and which indeed had such meaning for the Greeks that the verb for it in their language, *aristeuein* (to be the best), could be understood not merely as an

endeavor but also as an activity that makes up the whole of life. The model for such rivalry among men was still seen as the combat between Hector and Achilles, which, quite apart from who wins or loses, gives each the opportunity to show himself as he really is, that is, by appearing in reality to become fully real. It is much the same with the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, which for the first time gives them both the opportunity to really show themselves. The war also mirrors the quarrel of the gods, which not only gives its full meaning to the battle raging on earth, but also clearly reveals that there is an element of divinity on both sides, even when one is doomed to perish. The war against Troy has two sides, and Homer sees it no less through the eyes of the Trojans than through those of the Greeks. This Homeric way of showing that all things with two sides make their real appearance only in struggle also lies behind Heraclitus' statement that war is "the father of all things" (fragment B53). Here, the brute force of war in all its horror is derived directly from the strength and might of men, who can display their inherent energies only if something or someone opposes them and tests their mettle.

Two elements that appear almost undifferentiated in Homer—the sheer strength of great deeds and the ravishing power of the great words that accompany them and sway the assembly of men who see and hear them—can later be seen very clearly separated from each other: in athletic contests, which provided the only opportunity for Greeks to come together and admire a display of nonviolent strength, and in oratorical contests and those never-ending verbal exchanges that took place within the polis itself. In the latter, the two-sided aspect of things, which in Homer is inherent in man-to-man combat, takes place solely in the realm of speech, where every victory can prove as equivocal as Achilles' and every defeat as praiseworthy as Hector's. But oratorical con-

tests do not remain limited to the two sides taken by the orators, who, to be sure, reveal themselves as persons in the sides they take, for every speech, however "objective" it pretends to be, also inevitably discloses its speaker in a way that is difficult to define but nonetheless part of its compelling nature. Here, the same two-sidedness that Homer provided in his poem of the Trojan War takes on the tremendous manifold of the topics addressed, which, insofar as they are spoken about by so many people in the presence of so many others, are drawn into the public light of day, where they are forced, as it were, to reveal all their aspects. Only in such a manifold can one and the same topic appear in its full reality, whereby what must be borne in mind is that every topic has as many sides and can appear in as many perspectives as there are people to discuss it. Since for the Greeks the public political space is common to all *(koinon)*, the space where the citizens assemble, it is the realm in which all things can first be recognized in their many-sidedness. This ability to see the same thing first from two opposing sides and then from all sides—an ability ultimately based in Homeric impartiality, unique in antiquity, and whose passionate intensity is unexcelled even in our own time—also underlies certain tricks of the Sophists, whose importance in liberating human thought from the constrictions of dogma we underestimate if, in following Plato, we condemn them on moral grounds. And yet their extraordinary skill in argumentation is of secondary importance to the first successful creation by the polis of a political realm. The crucial factor is not that one could now turn arguments around and stand propositions on their heads, but rather that one gained the ability to truly *see* topics from various sides—that is, politically—with the result that people understood how to assume the many possible perspectives provided by the real world, from which one and the same topic can be regarded

and in which each topic, despite its oneness, appears in a great diversity of views. This is considerably more than our simply putting aside personal interests, which results only in a negative gain; moreover, in cutting ties to our own interests, we run the danger of losing our ties to the world and our attachment to its objects and the affairs that take place in it. The ability to see the same thing from various standpoints stays in the human world; it is simply the exchange of the standpoint given us by nature for that of someone else, with whom we share the same world, resulting in a true freedom of movement in our mental world that parallels our freedom of movement in the physical one. Being able to persuade and influence others, which was how the citizens of the polis interacted politically, presumed a kind of freedom that was not irrevocably bound, either mentally or physically, to one's own standpoint or point of view.

The Greeks' unique ideal, and thus their standard for an aptitude that is specifically political, lies in *phronēsis,* the insight of the political man (the *politikos,* not the statesman, who did not even exist in this world),* which has so little to do with wisdom that Aristotle could explicitly define it in contradistinction to the wisdom of the philosophers. Such insight into a political issue means nothing other than the greatest possible overview of all the possible standpoints and viewpoints from which an issue can be seen and judged. Over the ensuing centuries, hardly anyone speaks of *phronēsis,* which for Aristotle is the cardinal virtue of the political man. We do not run across it again until Kant, in his discussion of common sense as a faculty of judgment. He calls it an "enlarged mentality" and explicitly defines it as the ability "to think from the position of every other person" (*Critique of Judgment,* §40).

*Plato's *Statesman,* quoted earlier, in Greek is called *Politikos.*—Ed.

Unfortunately, it remains characteristic of Kant that this political virtue par excellence plays hardly any role in his own political philosophy, that is, in his development of the categorical imperative; the validity of the categorical imperative is derived from "thinking in agreement with the self," and reason as the giver of laws does not presuppose other persons but only a self that is not in contradiction with itself. In point of fact, the real political faculty in Kant's philosophy is not lawgiving reason, but judgment, which in an enlarged mentality has the power to override its "subjective private conditions."* In the case of the polis, the political man, given the characteristic excellence that distinguished him, was at the same time the freest man: for thanks to the insight that enabled him to consider all standpoints, he enjoyed the greatest freedom of movement.

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the freedom of the political man definitely depended on the presence and equality of others. A thing can reveal itself under many aspects only in the presence of peers who regard it from their various perspectives. Wherever the equality of others and of their particular opinions is abrogated, as, for instance, under tyranny, in which everything and everyone is sacrificed to the standpoint of the tyrant, no one is free and no one is capable of insight, not even the tyrant. Moreover, this freedom of the political man, which in its highest form was coincident with discerning insight, has next to nothing to do with our freedom of the will, or the Roman *libertas*, or the Christian *liberum arbitrium*—so little in fact that the Greek language does not even have a word for any of these notions. The

*In 1970 Arendt lectured on what she called Kant's "unwritten" political philosophy. Cf. H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* ed. R. Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).—Ed.

individual in his isolation is never free; he can become free only when he steps out into the polis and takes action there. Before freedom can become a mark of honor bestowed on a man or a type of men—Greeks, for instance, as opposed to barbarians—it is an attribute of the way human beings organize themselves and nothing else. Its place of origin is never inside man, whatever that inside may be, nor is it in his will, or his thinking, or his feelings; it is rather in the space between human beings, which can arise only when distinct individuals come together, and can continue to exist only as long as they remain together. Freedom has a space, and whoever is admitted into it is free; whoever is excluded is not free. The right of admission, and therefore freedom itself, was a possession that determined a man's life no less than riches or health.

Thus, to the Greek way of thinking, freedom was rooted in place, bound to one spot and limited in its dimensions, and the limits of freedom's space were congruent with the walls of the city, of the polis or, more precisely, the agora contained within it. Outside those borders lay, first, foreign territory where one could not be free because one was no longer a citizen there or, better, a political man; and, second, the private household, where one could not be free either, because there one had no equals who alone constitute freedom's space. This second point was likewise of great significance for the very different Roman concept of what constitutes politics, public affairs, the *res publica* or republic. For the Romans, the family was so much a space where one was not free that Mommsen, as we have seen, translated the word *familia* as meaning "servitude." There were, however, two reasons for this servitude. The first was that the *pater familias* ruled over his large household—where his wife, children, and slaves constituted the *familia*—as a veritable monarch or despot, which left him without those equals before whom he could have

appeared in freedom. And the second was that a household ruled by one man made no allowance for struggle or rivalry because it had to form a unity that could only be disrupted by conflicting interests, standpoints, and viewpoints. And, in that case, the multiplicity of aspects—where being able to move freely about is the essential substance of being free, of acting and speaking in freedom—was automatically eliminated. In short, a lack of freedom was the prerequisite for the undivided unity that was as essential for living together in the family as freedom and struggle were for the communal life of the polis. This makes the free arena of politics look like an island, the only place from which the principle of brute force and coercion has been excluded from human relations. Whatever remains outside this small space—the family on the one hand and the relations of the polis itself to other political units on the other—remains subject to the principle of coercion and the right that comes with might. Thus, in the view of antiquity, the status of the individual was so completely dependent on the space in which he happened to move at any given time that a man who, as the adult son of a Roman father, "was subject to his father . . . might also as a citizen find himself in a position to command his father" (Mommsen, p. 71).

Let us return to our point of departure. We were attempting to reflect on the Trojan war of annihilation as embellished by Homer and to give some thought as to how the Greeks were able to deal with the annihilating element of brute force, which destroys both the world and the political sphere. It would appear as if the Greeks separated struggle—without which neither Achilles nor Hector would ever have made his appearance and been able to prove who he was—from the military world of war, in which brute force has its original home, and in so doing turned struggle into an integrating component of the polis and the political

sphere. At the same time, any concern as to what might happen to the defeated and vanquished of whatever wars happened to be raging was left to their poets and historians, whereby we must also note that in turn their works, though not the deeds that gave rise to them, became part of the polis and its politics, much like the statues of Phidias and other artists, whose works necessarily became tangible, worldly components of the public political realm, even though they themselves, given their professions, were not considered equals or free citizens. But it was the figure of Achilles in his unceasing effort to excel, always to be the best and to gain immortal glory, that remained the standard that distinguished the Greek in his polis as a human type. The necessary presence of the many in general and of many equals in particular—that is, the agora as the Homeric place of assembly—could become a reality in the case of the campaign against Troy only because many "kings," that is, free men living in the isolation of their households, banded together to enlist in a grand enterprise, with each taking part because only in such a joint effort was it possible for him to gain glory so far from home and the confinement of the household. This Homeric gathering of heroes was now stripped of what in its time had been its strictly adventurous character. The polis is firmly linked to Homer's agora, but this place of assembly is now permanent, not the campsite of an army that will move on after its work is done and must wait centuries until a poet arrives to grant it what it rightly claims on the basis of its great deeds and words before gods and men—immortal fame. But as we know from Pericles' speech, as reported by Thucydides, the polis at its height now hoped to engage in that same struggle without any use of brute force and without poets or bards to guarantee the fame that is the sole means by which mortals can become immortal.

The Romans were the twin people of the Greeks, first because they derived their origin as a people from the same event, the Trojan War, and second insofar as they considered themselves descendants not of Romulus, but of Aeneas, just as the Greeks believed themselves to be descendants of the Achaeans. They therefore deliberately traced their political existence back to a defeat, from which came the founding of a new city on a strange soil—not the founding of something new and unheard-of, but a renewed founding of something old, the founding of a new homeland and a new home for their *penates*, the gods of Troy's royal hearth that Aeneas had rescued before fleeing, together with his father and son, across the sea to Latium. The point here was, as Virgil says, in his final rendering of the Greek, Sicilian, and Roman embellishments on the Trojan saga, to undo Hector's defeat and the destruction of Troy: "Another Paris ignites another fire to burn down Pergamus anew" (*Aeneid*, viii, 321f). This is Aeneas' task, and if that task is the focal point, then the true hero of the saga is not Achilles, but Hector, who denied the Danaeans their victory for ten long years. But this is not the crucial point. What is crucial is that this replay of the Trojan War on Italian soil reverses the relationships in Homer's poem. If Aeneas is the successor of both Paris and Hector, the fire he enkindles is once again all about a woman, but not the adulteress Helen, but Lavinia, his bride, and like Hector he is met with the implacable wrath of an Achilles, that is, of Turnus, who explicitly identifies himself as such—"tell Priam that here, too, an Achilles can be found" (*Aeneid*, ix, 742)—but once the battle is engaged, Turnus (Achilles) flees, and Aeneas (Hector) pursues him. And so, just as Hector in Homer's version obviously did not place fame and glory above all else, but "fell in battle, a defender of his family altars," so, too, in Aeneas' case, what brings him to tear himself

away from Dido is not the thought of glory won by great deeds, since "the pain and effort is not worth the praise" (*Aeneid,* ix, 232ff), but rather the thought of his son and descendants, his concern for his reputation and that his line continue, which for Romans meant a guarantee of earthly immortality.

This tale of how Rome's political existence originated in Troy and the war that engulfed it—first in the form of a traditional saga, but then intentionally embellished in ever richer forms—is surely among the most remarkable and amazing events in Western history. It is as if a full and fulfilled reality had set itself alongside the spiritual and poetic ambiguity and impartiality of Homer's poem, as if something were realized that had never before been realized and apparently could not be realized in history: full justice for the cause of the defeated, not as judged by posterity, which has always been able to say with Cato, *"victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catoni"* (the victorious cause pleased the gods, but the defeated one pleased Cato),* but by the course of history itself. It is already unprecedented enough that Homer sings the glory of the defeated and in a celebratory poem shows how one and the same event can have two sides, and how the poet has no right to use the victory of one side to strike down and slay, so to speak, the other side yet a second time. It is easy to understand just how important and integral a part of their reality a people's self-interpretation can be when we recall that, in their first documented encounter with the Greeks, the Romans, as successors to the Trojans, allied themselves with the Ilians, a tribe to whom they were related. But for this sort of thing to actually play itself out in the real world seems even a shade more amazing. For it would appear as if at the very beginning of Western history

*Lucan, *Pharsalia,* I, 128.—Ed.

there actually was a war that matches Heraclitus' definition of it as "the father of all things," because it forced one single event to appear in history in both of its originally opposing aspects. Ever since, there is nothing in either the sensate or the historical-political world that has assumed full reality for us as a thing or event until all its aspects have been discovered, all its sides revealed, and it has been acknowledged and articulated from every possible stand-point within the human world.

Perhaps only from this Roman perspective, in which the fire is rekindled in order to reverse a previous annihilation, can we understand what a war of annihilation is truly about and why, quite apart from all moral considerations, it cannot be allowed a place in politics. If it is true that a thing *is* real within both the historical-political and the sensate world only if it can show itself and be perceived from all its sides, then there must always be a plurality of individuals or peoples and a plurality of standpoints to make reality even possible and to guarantee its continuation. In other words, the world comes into being only if there are perspectives; it exists as the order of worldly things only if it is viewed, now this way, now that, at any given time. If a people or nation, or even just some specific human group, which offers a unique view of the world arising from its particular position in the world—a position that, however it came about, cannot readily be duplicated—is annihilated, it is not merely that a people or a nation or a given number of individuals perishes, but rather that a portion of our common world is destroyed, an aspect of the world that has revealed itself to us until now but can never reveal itself again. Annihilation is therefore not just tantamount to the end of a world; it also takes its annihilator with it. Strictly speaking, politics is not so much about human beings as it is about the world that comes into being between them and endures beyond them. To the

extent that politics becomes destructive and causes worlds to end, it destroys and annihilates itself. To put it another way, the more peoples there are in the world who stand in some particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be. The more standpoints there are within any given nation from which to view the same world that shelters and presents itself equally to all, the more significant and open to the world that nation will be. If, on the other hand, there were to be some cataclysm that left the earth with only one nation, and matters in that nation were to come to a point where everyone saw and understood everything from the same perspective, living in total unanimity with one another, the world would have come to an end in a historical-political sense. Those worldless human beings left on earth would have little more in common with us than those isolated tribes who were vegetating their lives away when first discovered on new continents by European explorers, tribes that the Europeans then either drew into the human world or eradicated without ever being aware that they too were human beings. In other words, human beings in the true sense of the term can exist only where there is a world, and there can be a world in the true sense of the term only where the plurality of the human race is more than a simple multiplication of a single species.

That is why it is of great importance that this repetition on Italian soil of the Trojan War, to which the Roman nation traced its political and historical existence, did not end in yet another annihilation of the vanquished, but in an alliance and a treaty. It was most definitely not a matter of fanning the old flames anew, of simply returning to the old outcome, but rather of inventing a new outcome for war's conflagration. Treaty and alliance, in both their origin and in the sense so richly stamped upon them by the

Romans, are intimately linked to war between nations and, according to the Roman view of things, represent the natural pursuit, so to speak, of every war. There is something Homeric about this as well, or perhaps it was something that even predated Homer as he set about giving the Trojan sagas their final poetic form. It contains an awareness that even the most hostile encounter between people gives rise to something they have in common, precisely because—as Plato once put it—"just as the doer does, so, too, the sufferer suffers" (*Gorgias*, 476d), which indeed is exactly the case, so that when both deed and suffering are over, they can become two sides of the same event. But that means that the event itself has already been transformed from conflict into something else that is first revealed to the remembering and celebrating eye of the poet or to the retrospective gaze of the historian. Politically, however, the hostile encounter that is part of conflict can remain an encounter between people only if the battle is broken off before the destruction of the vanquished and a different kind of encounter arises out of battle. Every peace treaty, even if it is not really a treaty but a diktat, is concerned with a new ordering not only of things as they existed before the outbreak of hostilities but also of the new thing that made its appearance in the course of hostilities and is shared by both doers and sufferers. Such a transformation of straightforward annihilation into something different and enduring can already be found in Homer's impartiality, which at the least does not permit the glory and fame of the vanquished to perish, and forever links the name of Achilles with that of Hector. For the Greeks, however, such a transformation of a hostile encounter was limited exclusively to poetry and memory and achieved no direct political effect.

It is not simply that historically the treaty and the alliance are

central political concepts of Roman origin; it is likewise true that both ideas are profoundly foreign to the Greek mind and its notion of what belongs in the political realm of the polis. What happened when the descendants of Troy arrived on Italian soil was no more and no less than the growth of politics in the very place where it had reached its limits and come to an end among the Greeks. With the Romans, politics grew not between citizens of equal rank within a city, but rather between alien and unequally matched peoples who first came together in battle. It is true that, as we noted, struggle, and with it war, marked the beginning of political existence for the Greeks as well, but only insofar as they became themselves through conflict and then came together to preserve their own nature. For the Romans, this same struggle became the means by which they recognized both themselves and their opponents. Thus, when the battle was over, they did not retreat inside their walls, to be with themselves and their glory. On the contrary, they gained something new, a new political arena, secured in a peace treaty according to which yesterday's enemies became tomorrow's allies. In political terms, the peace treaty that binds two nations allows for a new world to rise up between them or, more precisely, guarantees the continuation of a new world that they share in common, which arose out of their meeting in battle, where deeds and suffering brought forth one and the same thing.

The solution to the question of war—whether it was originally a Roman idea or arose only later when they thought about and embellished the Trojan war of annihilation—is the origin of both the concept of law and the extraordinary importance that Roman political thought came to attach to law and the formulation of laws. For the Roman *lex,* which was very different from and even contrary to what the Greeks understood by *nomos,* actually means

"lasting tie" and very quickly came to mean "contract," whether between private citizens or as a treaty between nations. Consequently a law is something that links human beings together, and it comes into being not by diktat or by an act of force but rather through mutual agreements. Formulation of law, of this lasting tie that follows the violence of war, is itself tied to proposals and counterproposals, that is, to speech, which in the view of both the Greeks and the Romans was central to all politics.

The crucial distinction, however, is that only for the Romans does legislative activity, and with it the laws themselves, belong to the realm of politics, whereas according to the Greeks, the legislator's activity was so radically disconnected from the truly political activities and affairs of the citizens within the polis that the lawgiver did not even have to be a citizen of the city but could be engaged from outside to perform his task, much like a sculptor or architect commissioned to supply what the city required. By contrast, Rome's law of the Twelve Tables, though some details may be based on Greek models, was not the work of one man, but rather a contract between two warring factions, the patricians and the plebes, that required the approval of the entire populace, the *consensus omnium,* to which Roman historiography assigned "a unique role"* in the formulation of laws. Significant for the contractual nature of the law is the way this basic law—which goes back to the founding of the Roman nation, the *populus Romanus*—does not unite the quarreling parties simply by erasing the distinction between patricians and plebes. The opposite was the case: the explicit prohibition—though later rescinded—of marriage between patricians and plebes emphasized their separation even more explicitly than before. Only the state of hostility

*Franz Altheim, *Römische Geschichte II*, 232.—Ed.

between them was set aside, but to the Roman mind what made this arrangement a matter of law was that from now on a contract, a lasting tie, linked patricians and plebes to each other. The *res publica,* the life of public affairs, which arose out of this contract and evolved into the Roman Republic, was located in that in-between space between formerly hostile partners. Here, then, the law is something that establishes new relationships between men, and if it links human beings to one another, it does so not in the sense of natural law, in which all people recognize the same things as good and evil on the basis of a voice of conscience implanted, as it were, by nature, or as commandments handed down from above and promulgated for all people, but in the sense of an agreement between contractual partners. And just as such an agreement can come about only when the interests of both sides are recognized, this basic Roman law is likewise a matter of "creating a common law that takes both parties into account" (Altheim, p. 214).

In order to correctly assess the extraordinary political fruitfulness of the Roman concept of law—quite apart from any moral considerations, which must remain secondary for our study here—we must briefly review the very different Greek understanding of what law originally is. For the Greeks, law is neither an agreement nor a contract; it certainly does not arise between men in the back-and-forth exchange of words and action, and thus does not itself belong in the political arena, but is essentially conceived by a lawgiver and must first exist before it can ever enter into the political realm. As such, it is prepolitical, but in the sense that it is constitutive for all further political action and interaction. Just as the walls of a city, to which Heraclitus once compared the law, must first be built before there can be a city identifiable by its shape and borders, the law determines the char-

acter of its inhabitants, setting them apart and making them distinguishable from the inhabitants of all other cities. The law is a city wall that is instituted and erected by one man, inside of which is created the real political realm where many men move about freely. That is also why Plato invokes Zeus, the guardian of borders and border stones, before he sets about promulgating laws for a new city yet to be founded. What matters is the marking of borders and not the formation of ties and linkages. The law is, so to speak, something by which the polis enters into its continuing life, something it cannot abolish without losing its identity, and violation of the law is an act of hubris, the overstepping of a limit placed on life itself. The law is not valid outside the polis; its binding power applies only to the space that it encloses and delimits. Even for Socrates, overstepping the law and stepping beyond the borders of the polis are literally one and the same thing.

The crucial point is that the law—although it defines the space in which men live with one another without using force—has something violent about it in terms of both its origins and its nature. It comes into being by means of production, not action; the lawgiver resembles the architect of the city and its builder, not the *politikos* and citizen. The law produces the arena where politics occurs, and contains in itself the violent force inherent in all production. As a made product, it stands in opposition to anything that has come into being naturally and needs no assistance, either from gods or men, in order to exist. Everything that is not natural and did not come into being on its own contains a law according to which it was produced, each sort of thing embodying its own law, and there is no more relationship between these laws than there is between the products of each law. "A law," Pindar says in a famous fragment (No. 48 [Boeckh]) quoted by Plato in the *Gorgias,* "is the king over all, the mortal and the immortal

alike, and in creating justice it wields the most powerful force with overpowering strength." For the people subject to it, this force expresses itself in the authority of the laws: They are the masters and commanders in the polis, where no one has the right to command his peers. Thus laws are both father and despot in one, as Socrates explains to his friend in the *Crito* (50e–51b). This is not just because despotism prevailed in the households of antiquity and likewise determined the relation of father and son that the term "father and despot" was not uncommon, but also because the law sired the citizen, so to speak, much as the father sired the son (or at any rate was just as much a prerequisite for a son's political being as his father was for his physical existence), and was therefore responsible, according to the general view of the polis, though not of Socrates and Plato, for educating the citizenry. But because, unlike the father-son relationship, obedience to the law has no natural end, it can also be compared to the relationship between master and slave, so that in his relationship to the law—that is, to those limits inside of which he was free and that circumscribed the space of his freedom—the citizen of the polis was a "son and slave" his entire life. Thus the Greeks, who were subject to no one's orders inside the polis, could warn the Persians not to underestimate their effectiveness in combat, for they all feared the law of their polis every bit as much as the Persians feared their king.

Whatever our interpretation of this Greek conception of law, for them the law could never serve to build a bridge between one nation and another, or between one political community and another within the same nation. Even in the case of the founding of a new colony, the law of the mother city was never enough, and those who ventured forth to found a new polis required a new lawgiver, a *nomothetēs,* before their new political realm could be

recognized as firmly established. It is obvious that under these basic conditions the building of an empire was completely out of the question—even after the Persian Wars had awakened all of Greece to a kind of Hellenic national consciousness, an awareness of sharing a common language and political structure. The unification of all Hellas might have saved the Greek nation from its doom, but in that case the true nature of the Greeks would have been doomed as well.

Perhaps we can best measure the gulf between the notion of law as the sole, unconstrained commander in the polis and the Roman concept if we recall that Virgil described the Latins when Aeneas arrives among them as a people who "without fetters or laws . . . holds by its will to the customs of its most ancient god" (*Aeneid,* vii, 203–4). Law first emerges because a treaty must now be arranged between the native inhabitants and the newcomers. Rome is founded on this treaty, and if it is Rome's mission "to place all earth beneath its laws" (*Aeneid,* iv, 231), that means nothing less than incorporating the entire earth into a system of treaties, a task for which this people was uniquely qualified because it derived its own historical existence from a treaty.

If we want to express this in modern categories, we would have to say that for the Romans, politics began as foreign policy, that is, as the very thing the Greek mind had completely excluded from politics. Likewise, although the political realm itself could arise and endure for the Romans only within the scope of the law, this realm only arose and expanded when different nations encountered each other. The encounter itself occurs as war, and the Latin word *populus* originally meant "troop strength" (Altheim, ii, p. 71), but this war is not the end but rather the beginning of politics, or of a new political sphere arising out of peace treaties and alliances. This, then, is the meaning of Roman "clemency" so

renowned in antiquity, of *parcere subiectis,* the sparing of the vanquished, by which Rome organized first the regions and peoples of Italy and then their possessions outside of Italy. Nor does the destruction of Carthage negate this principle as it was actually exercised in the political world—that is, never to destroy but always to expand and conclude new treaties. What was destroyed in the case of Carthage was not a military power to which, following Rome's victory, Scipio offered such unprecedented favorable conditions that the modern historian must ask himself whether he was acting more in his own or in Rome's interest (Mommsen, i, p. 663), nor was it a competing commercial power in the Mediterranean. What was destroyed was, above all else, "a government that never kept its word and never forgave" and thus embodied an anti-Roman political principle against which Roman statesmanship was powerless and which would have destroyed Rome had not Rome destroyed it first. This or something like it must have been what Cato had in mind, and modern historians have followed him in justifying the destruction of a city that, on the global scale of things at the time, was the sole surviving rival to Rome.

Whatever the validity of such justification, what is crucial in our context is that it did not correspond to Roman thought and could not have prevailed among Roman historians. The Roman thing to do was to allow an enemy city to live on as an opponent, just as Scipio the Elder tried to do after his victory over Hannibal. The Roman thing to do was to recall the fate of Rome's ancestors, and like Aemilianus Scipio, the destroyer of Carthage, to break into tears over the ruins of the city and, with forebodings of doom, to quote Homer: "The day will come when sacred Ilium will perish, / Priam himself and the people of the lance-wielding king" (*Iliad,* iv, 164f.; vi, 448f.). And, finally, it was characteristically Roman to see this victory, which destroyed a city and made

Rome a world power, as the beginning of Rome's own end—as almost all Roman historians until Tacitus tended to do. In other words, the Roman thing was to acknowledge that the adversary to one's own existence, precisely when that adversary revealed itself as such in war, had to be spared and kept alive—not out of compassion, but for the sake of expanding Rome, which would henceforth include this most alien of forces in a new alliance. This insight prompted the Romans, despite their own immediate self-interest, to be the determined advocates of Greek freedom and independence, even when such conduct appeared to be pure folly given the actual state of affairs in Greek cities. They did so not because they wanted to atone in Greece for their sins against Carthage, but because they saw the Greek character as Rome's genuine counterpart. For the Romans, it was as if Hector had encountered Achilles again and offered him an alliance once the war was over. Except that, unfortunately, Achilles by then had grown old and cantankerous.

It would be a mistake to apply standards of morality here and to see this in terms of ethical impulses encroaching on political considerations. Carthage was the first city Rome had to deal with that equaled Rome's power and simultaneously embodied a principle opposed to Rome's. And thus, for the first time, Rome's political principle of making treaties and forming alliances proved not to be applicable everywhere but revealed its limits. To understand this, we must realize that the laws with which Rome first organized the regions of Italy and then the countries of the world were not simply treaties in our sense of the word, but that they aimed at a lasting tie, which was the essential implication of an alliance. From these allies of Rome's, from these *socii,* almost all of which were enemies who had been conquered at some point, there emerged the Roman *societas,* which has nothing to do with

society but rather with a cooperative community that fostered relationships between partners. What the Romans themselves were seeking was not so much Roman domination over peoples and lands, an *Imperium Romanum,* which as we've known since Mommsen fell to them and was pressed upon them almost against their will, but a *societas Romana*, an infinitely expandable system of alliances initiated by Rome, in which peoples and lands were not only bound to Rome by temporary and renewable treaties, but also became Rome's eternal allies. Rome's failure in the case of Carthage was that in this case it would only have been possible to enter into a treaty between two equals—into a kind of coexistence, to put it in modern terms—but such a modern sort of treaty lay beyond the possibilities of Roman thought.

This is no accident and should not be ascribed to Rome's obtuseness. What the Romans did not know and indeed, given the basic experience that inspired their political existence from beginning to end, could not have known were precisely those characteristics inherent in action that had inspired the Greeks to set limits to action by means of the *nomos* and to interpret the law not as a link and a relationship, but rather as an enclosing border that no one should overstep. Because by its very nature action always creates relationships and ties as it moves into the world, there is inherent in it a lack of moderation and what Aeschylus called an "insatiability," which can be held in check only by *nomos,* by law in the Greek sense of the word. To the Greek mind, this lack of moderation did not lie in the immoderateness of the man who acts, or in his hubris, but in the fact that the relationships arising through action are and must be of the sort that keep extending without limits. By linking men of action together, each relationship established by action ends up in a web of ties and relationships in which it triggers new links, changes the constellation of

existing relationships, and thus always reaches out ever further, setting much more into interconnected motion than the man who initiates action ever could have foreseen. The Greeks countered this thrust toward limitlessness with the *nomos,* limiting action to what happens between men within a polis and when, as inevitably happened, action drew the polis into matters lying beyond it, such matters were referred back to the polis. This is how, to the Greek way of thinking, action becomes political in the first place, which is to say bound to the polis and thus to the highest form of human communal life. The *nomos* limits actions and prevents them from dissipating into an unforeseeable, constantly expanding system of relationships, and by doing so gives actions their enduring form, turning each action into a deed that in its greatness—that is, in its surpassing excellence—can be remembered and preserved. Thus the *nomos* becomes a counterforce to the transience of everything mortal, as it was experienced so uniquely in the age of Greek tragedy, to the transience of the spoken word and to the fleeting moment of the accomplished deed. The price the Greeks paid for this form-giving power of their *nomos* was their inability to build an empire, and there is no doubt that all Hellas ultimately perished because of the *nomos* of the *poleis,* the city-states, which though they were able to proliferate as colonies could never join together and unite in a permanent alliance. But we can say with equal justification that the Romans were also victims of their law, of their *lex,* which, although it allowed them to establish lasting ties and alliances wherever they went, was in itself unlimited and thus forced them against their own will—indeed absent any will to power or lust for dominion—to rule the entire globe, a dominion that once achieved could only collapse. It almost seems to lie in the nature of the matter that what perished forever with the fall of Rome was the hub of a world, and with it the specific Roman pos-

sibility of centering the entire world around a hub. But when we think today of the fall of Athens, the surmise lies close at hand that in this case it was not the central point of a world that vanished forever, but man's highest potentialities within the world.

The price the Romans paid for their unprecedented ability for constantly expanding lasting ties and forming alliances was not just the creation of an empire that expanded beyond all limits and thus finally brought about the fall of their city and the Italy it ruled. Politically less catastrophic but spiritually no less fateful was the price that came with the loss of Greek and Homeric impartiality, of a sense of greatness and surpassing excellence, wherever it occurred and in all its forms, and of the will to lend immortality to greatness by celebrating it. Roman historiography and literature are exclusively Roman in a way that Greek literature and historiography were never Greek, even in their decline. For the Romans, it was always a matter of recording the history of their city and of everything directly related to it, that is, to its growth and expansion after its founding: *ab urbe condita;* or, as in Virgil, it was a matter of telling what led to the founding of the city, the deeds and travels of Aeneas: *dum conderet urbem* (*Aeneid*, i, 5). In a certain sense one could say that the Greeks, who destroyed their enemies, were historically more just to them and passed on to us much more about them than did the Romans by making allies of their enemies. But taken in any moral sense, this judgment is wrong. For the Roman victors understood very well the moral dimensions of defeat and asked themselves, through the mouths of their vanquished foes, if they themselves were not "thieving world conquerors whose lust for destruction could find no more lands to subdue," and whether their obsession with establishing alliances and bringing the eternal ties of the law to others might not also be taken to mean that they were "the one

people among all people who pursue the void as passionately as they do abundance." From the perspective of the vanquished, in any case, it might very well appear as if what the Romans called "rule" was synonymous with plunder, murder, and theft, and that the *pax Romana*, that legendary Roman peace, was merely a name for the desert they left behind (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30). But as impressive as this and similar commentaries may be in comparison with modern patriotic and nationalistic historiography, the opposing view that they bring to the surface is really only the opposite side of any victory seen in human terms: the side of the defeated as defeated. The idea that there could be some other absolutely different entity equal to Rome in greatness and thus worthy of being remembered in history—an idea with which Herodotus begins his history of the Persian Wars—was utterly alien to the Romans.

Whatever Rome's limitations in this respect, there is no doubt that the concept of foreign policy—of *politics* in foreign relations—and consequently of the idea of a political order beyond the borders of one's own nation or city, is solely of Roman origin. The Roman politicization of the space between peoples marks the beginning of the Western world—indeed, it first created the Western world as *world*. There had been many civilizations before Rome, some of them extraordinarily rich and great, but what lay between them was not a world but only a desert, across which, if things went well, ties like fragile threads, or paths through untilled fields, might be established. If things did not go well, however, the desert spread, expanding into wars and destroying whatever worlds did exist. We are so accustomed to understanding law and justice in terms of the Ten Commandments, as precepts and prohibitions whose sole purpose is to demand obedience, that we easily forget the spatial character of

laws. All laws first create a space in which they are valid, and this space is the world in which we can move about in freedom. What lies outside this space is without law and, even more precisely, without world; as far as human community is concerned, it is a desert.

The nature of the threats confronting both our domestic and our foreign policies since the rise of totalitarian regimes is such that it causes what is truly political about both these policies to disappear. If wars are once again to be wars of annihilation, then the specifically political nature of foreign policy as practiced since the Romans will disappear, and the relations between nations fall back into an expanse that knows neither law nor politics, that destroys a world and leaves a desert. For what is destroyed in a war of annihilation is considerably more than the world of the vanquished foe; it is above all the in-between, the space that lies between the warring parties and their peoples, the territory that, taken as a whole, forms the world on earth. We previously noted that what has been destroyed by human hands can be produced again by human hands, but that statement does not apply to this in-between world, which does not owe its creation to production but to human action. For the world of relationships that arises out of action—man's essential political activity—is considerably more difficult to destroy than the manufactured world of things, in which the builder or fabricator remains the sole lord and master. But once this world of relationships is destroyed, then the laws of political action, whose processes can indeed be reversed only with great difficulty, are replaced by the law of the desert, which, as a wasteland between men, unleashes devastating processes that bear within them the same lack of moderation inherent in those free human actions that establish relationships. We are familiar with such processes of devastation from history,

and there is hardly a single instance in which they could have been halted before they dragged a whole world with its entire wealth of relationships to its doom.

Does Politics Still Have Any Meaning at All?

The age of wars and revolutions which Lenin predicted for this century and in which we are in fact living has, indeed on an unprecedented scale, made what happens in politics a basic factor in the personal fate of all people. But wherever this fate has unfolded with full force, and wherever human beings have been ripped into the maelstrom of events, this fate has brought calamity. And there is no consolation for the calamity that politics has brought to people, or for the even greater calamity with which it now threatens all of humanity. Wars in the twentieth century are not "storms of steel" (Jünger) that cleanse the political air, nor are they "the continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz); they are monstrous catastrophes that can transform the world into a desert and the earth into lifeless matter. On the other hand, all that revolutions—if we seriously regard them with Marx as the "locomotives of history" ("The Class Struggles in France, 1848–50")—have demonstrated with any clarity is that this train of history is evidently hurtling toward an abyss, and that revolutions, far from being able to avert calamity, only frighteningly accelerate the speed with which it unfolds.

Wars and revolutions, not the functioning of parliamentary governments and democratic party apparatuses, have shaped the basic political experiences of the twentieth century. To ignore them is tantamount to not living in the world in which in fact we live. Given such events, given the hard realities that such incursions have visited on our world and to which we can still bear witness every day, those people who, as best they can, go about the

business of government and regulate human affairs between catastrophes are like the horseman who rode across Lake Constance: The idea may well occur to us that only those who, for whatever reason, are not particularly conversant with the basic political experiences of our times are capable of bearing the burden of risks about which they know as little as the rider knew about the state of the frozen lake under his horse's feet.*

What wars and revolution have in common is that they stand under the sign of brute force. If wars and revolution are the basic political experiences of our time, that means that we are essentially moving across a field of violent experience that prompts us to equate political action with violence. This equation may prove fatal, because under present conditions the only possible consequence is that political action becomes meaningless, which is only too understandable given the immense role that violence has actually played in the history of all the peoples of the human race. It is as if, within the scope of our experience, the only thing that counts is the sum total of experiences people have had with politics.

Among the salient characteristics of violent action is that it requires material means and the introduction into human relations of tools made to coerce or kill. These tools are the arsenal of the means of force, which like all means are intended to achieve some end. In the case of defense, the end can be self-preservation, and in the case of attack, it can be conquest and domination. In the case of a revolution, the end can be the destruction or even the restoration of an old political entity or the construction of a new

*Arendt alludes to a German folktale in which a horseman unwittingly gallops across frozen, snow-covered Lake Constance. When informed of the peril he had been in, he falls down dead, literally scared to death.—Ed.

one. These ends are not the same thing as goals, which are always what political action pursues; the goals of politics are never anything more than the guidelines and directives by which we orient ourselves and which, as such, are never cast in stone, but whose concrete realizations are constantly changing because we are dealing with other people who also have goals. Only when brute force with its arsenal of means is introduced into the space between people—where until that point nothing has passed back and forth except speech, which is devoid of tangible means—do the goals of politics become ends, which are as firmly defined as the model on which any physical object is produced and like it determine the choice of means and justify and even sanctify them. If a political action that does not stand under the sign of brute force does not achieve its goals—which it never does in reality—that does not render the political action either pointless or meaningless. It cannot be pointless because it never pursued a "point," that is, an end, but has only been directed at goals, more or less successfully; and it is not meaningless because in the back-and-forth of exchanged speech—between individuals and peoples, between states and nations—that space in which everything else that takes place is first created and then sustained. What in political language is called a "breakdown in relations" is the abandonment of that in-between space, which all violent action first destroys before it proceeds to annihilate those who live outside of it.

In politics, then, we have to differentiate between ends and goals and meaning. The meaning of a thing, as opposed to its end, is always contained within the thing itself, and the meaning of an activity can exist only as long as the activity continues. This is true of all activities, and of actions as well, whether they pursue an end or not. It is just the opposite with ends; an end does not begin to become a reality until the activity that produced it has

been concluded—just as the existence of any given produced object begins at that moment when its producer has put the final touch to it. The goals by which we orient ourselves set the standards by which everything that is done must be judged; they go beyond or transcend what is done in the same sense that every yardstick transcends what it has to measure. The goals of action have in common with ends the fact that they lie outside action and have an existence independent of whatever action is undertaken; they have in common with meaning the fact that they are much less tangible than ends, although unlike meaning they can continue to exist past the completion of any particular action. If it were true that political action pursues ends and must be judged according to its expediency, it would follow that politics is concerned with things that are not political in themselves but superior to politics, just as all ends must be superior to the means by which they are accomplished. It would also follow that political action will cease once its end is achieved, and that politics in general—if it is nothing more than the proper, that is, expedient, means for achieving the nonpolitical ends that are its sole raison d'être—will at some point disappear entirely from human history. And finally, in the context of expedient action, where nothing counts except the achievement of postulated and fixed ends, brute force will always play a major role.

In addition to these three elements of every political action—the end that it pursues, the goal which it has in mind and by which it orients itself, and the meaning that reveals itself in the course of the action—there is a fourth element, which, although it is never the direct cause of action, is nevertheless what first sets it into motion. Following Montesquieu in his discussion of polities in *L'Esprit des lois,* I would like to call this element the "principle of action," and in psychological terms, one might say that it is the

fundamental conviction that a group of people share. There are a large number of such fundamental convictions that have played a role in the course of political actions and that have come down to us through history, although Montesquieu knows only three: honor in monarchies, virtue in republics, and fear under tyranny. To these principles we can easily add fame, as we know it from the world of Homer; or freedom, as we find it in Athens' classical period; or justice; or even equality, if by that we understand the belief in the innate worth of every human being. The extraordinary significance of these principles is not only that they first move human beings to act but that they are also the source of constant nourishment for their actions. To prevent misunderstanding, we must first deal with one difficulty, which is not simply that the principles that inspire action vary with various polities and at different periods in history. What was a principle of action in one period can in another become a goal by which the action orients itself, or even an end that it pursues. Immortal fame, for example, was the principle of action only in the Homeric world, but throughout antiquity it remained one of the goals by which people oriented themselves and judged their actions. To take another example, freedom can be a principle as it was in the Athenian polis, but it can also be a standard by which those who live in a monarchy measure whether the king has perhaps exceeded the limits of his power, and in times of revolution it can easily become an end that revolutionaries believe they can directly pursue.

When, in the light of the peril to which political events have exposed humanity, we ask whether politics still has any meaning at all, we are also posing—in vague ways and without taking into account their various possible meanings—a whole series of very different questions. What resonates in the question that was our

point of departure is, first: Does politics even have any purpose, any end, at all? And this questions means: Are the ends that political action can pursue worth the means that under certain circumstances must be employed to achieve them? Second, within the political realm, are there any goals at all by which we might reliably orient ourselves? And if these do exist, are their standards not completely ineffective and therefore utopian? Does not every political enterprise, once set in motion, cease to bother with goals and standards and instead follow the course that is inherent in it and cannot be stopped by anything outside of it? Third, is it not typical of political action, at least in our time, that it is devoid of all principles, so that instead of arising out of the many possible wellsprings of human community and nourishing itself from those depths, it opportunistically clings to the surface of daily events, letting itself be tossed about in various directions, so that what is ballyhooed today always directly contradicts what happened yesterday? Has action not brought itself to the point of absurdity and buried those very principles or wellsprings that perhaps once set it into motion?

These are the questions that inevitably present themselves to anyone who begins to reflect on politics in our time. But in the form they present themselves, these questions cannot be answered; they are to some extent rhetorical or, better, exclamatory questions that necessarily remain trapped in the same field of experience from which they arose, which is defined and delineated by our categories and conceptions of brute force. It is in the nature of ends that they justify the means necessary to achieve them. But what ends can justify means that, under certain circumstances, could destroy humanity and organic life on earth? It is in the nature of goals that they limit both ends and means and thereby seal off action from the danger of immoderation always inherent in it. But

if this is so, then goals have already failed once it becomes clear that an action directed toward a given end has become pointless. Otherwise we would never have reached the point of putting at the disposal of political action the means of force that are available to great powers today and will presumably be in the hands of all sovereign states in the not too distant future.

The extraordinarily narrow horizon of experience left open to us for politics commensurate with the experiences of our century perhaps reveals itself nowhere more clearly than in the fact that we are automatically prepared to question the meaning of politics the moment we become convinced that action has neither an end nor a goal. The question as to the principles of action no longer informs our thinking about politics, at least not since the question as to which polities and forms of government represent the best of human communal life has fallen silent—that is, since the decades of the American Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, with its lively discussion of the possible advantages and disadvantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy and/or some polity that could mix monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic elements in a republic. And indeed the question about the meaning of politics—that is, about those enduring elements that are worthy of being remembered and are revealed only in our living and acting together politically—has hardly ever been asked in earnest since classical antiquity. We ask about the meaning of political action, but what we mean are its goals and ends, and we call this meaning only because we really no longer believe that politics has any meaning in a literal sense. It is because of our inexperience that we tend to lump together the various possible elements of action and declare that distinctions such as those between ends and goals, principle and meaning, are useless except as an exercise in hairsplitting.

Our unwillingness to make such distinctions does not, of

course, prevent genuine, factual differences from making themselves felt in the real world; it merely prevents us from adequately understanding what is actually happening. The goals, ends, and meaning of actions have so little in common that in the course of one and the same action they can end up at such loggerheads that the actors stumble into the gravest conflicts and the historians who follow after, whose task it is to accurately relate what in fact happened, can find themselves in endless debates over interpretation. Thus the only meaning that an action employing brute force can reveal and make visible in the world is the immense power of compulsion in human intercourse, and this quite independent of those ends which the force was intended to achieve. Even when the end is freedom, the meaning contained within such an action itself is coercion by violence. This very real conflict is the source of those paradoxical turns of phrase all too familiar to us from revolutions, according to which we must force men to be free or, as Robespierre suggested, replace the despotism of kings with the tyranny of freedom. The only thing that can in fact resolve, or at least mitigate, this murderous conflict between meaning and ends—a conflict equally inherent to both wars and revolutions—is a goal. For the goal of all force is peace—the goal, but not the end, since it is by the goal that we must judge all individual uses of force, applying Kant's dictum (in *Perpetual Peace*) that nothing should be allowed to happen in war that would make a subsequent peace impossible. The goal is not contained within the action itself, but, unlike ends, neither does it lie in the future. If it is at all achievable, it must remain constantly present, and precisely during times when it is not yet achieved. In the case of war, the function of the goal is obviously to constrain force; but by doing this the goal ends up in conflict with the ends for which the means of force have been mobilized, since these ends could be better and

more quickly achieved if the means were given free rein or, put differently, were organized in keeping with the ends. The source of the conflict between goals and ends lies in the fact that it is the nature of ends to degrade everything in their service to mere means, and to reject as useless anything that does not serve them. But since everything in violent action is done in terms of the ends/means category, then without question an action that does not acknowledge the goal of peace—and wars unleashed by totalitarian regimes replace the goal of peace with the goal of either world conquest or world domination—will surely always prove superior on the battlefield of brute force.

Because most of our experience with politics has been gained on the battlefield of brute force, it is only natural that we understand political action in the categories of coercion and being coerced, of ruling and being ruled, since it is in those categories that the true meaning of all violence is revealed. We are inclined to regard peace, which as a goal is intended to put force in its place and constrain its destructive momentum, as something that comes from beyond the realm of politics to keep politics in check; just as we are inclined to greet periods of peace, which even in our century have also inserted themselves between catastrophes, as those five- or ten-year intervals in which politics lets us catch our breath. When Ranke coined the term "the primacy of foreign policy," all he may have had in mind was that for the statesman secure borders and relations between nations must outrank all other concerns, since the sheer existence of every state or nation depends on them. It took the Cold War, or so we may be tempted to think, to teach us what the primacy of foreign policy really means. If in fact the only relevant concern of politics is foreign policy, or the danger that always lurks in relations between nations, that means no more and no less than that Clausewitz's

statement that war is the continuation of politics by other means has been set on its head, with politics as nothing other than the continuation of war, in the course of which the means of force are periodically replaced with those of cunning. And who could deny that the conditions of the arms race under which we live and have to live at least suggest that the Kantian statement that nothing should happen in a war to make a later peace impossible has likewise been set on its head, so that we live in a peace in which nothing may be left undone to make a future war still possible.

EPILOGUE

The modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us, can also be described as the spread of the desert. That we live and move in a desert-world was first recognized by Nietzsche, and it was also Nietzsche who made the first decisive mistake in diagnosing it. Like almost all who came after him, he believed that the desert is in ourselves, thereby revealing himself not only as one of the earliest conscious inhabitants of the desert but also, by the same token, as the victim of its most terrible illusion. Modern psychology is desert psychology: when we lose the faculty to judge—to suffer and condemn—we begin to think that there is something wrong with us if we cannot live under the conditions of desert life. Insofar as psychology tries to "help" us, it helps us "adjust" to those conditions, taking away our only hope, namely that we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world. Psychology turns everything topsy-turvy: precisely because we suffer under desert conditions we are still human and still intact; the danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it.

The greater danger is that there are sandstorms in the desert, that the desert is not always quiet as a cemetery where, after all,

everything remains possible, but can whip up a movement of its own. These storms are totalitarian movements whose chief characteristic is that they are extremely well-adjusted to the conditions of the desert. In fact, they reckon with nothing else and therefore seem to be the most adequate political form of desert life. Both psychology, the discipline of adjusting human life to the desert, and totalitarian movements, the sandstorms in which false or pseudo-action suddenly bursts forth from deathlike quiet, present imminent danger to the two human faculties that patiently enable us to transform the desert rather than ourselves, the conjoined faculties of passion and action. It is true that when caught up in totalitarian movements or the adjustments of modern psychology we suffer less; we lose the faculty of suffering and with it the virtue of endurance. Only those who can endure the passion of living under desert conditions can be trusted to summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action, of becoming an active being.

The sandstorms moreover menace even those oases in the desert without which none of us could endure, whereas psychology only tries to make us so accustomed to desert life that we no longer feel the need for oases. The oases are those fields of life which exist independently, or largely so, from political conditions. What went wrong is politics, our plural existence, and not what we can do and create insofar as we exist in the singular: in the isolation of the artist, in the solitude of the philosopher, in the inherently worldless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship—when one heart reaches out directly to the other, as in friendship, or when the in-between, the world, goes up in flames, as in love. Without the intactness of these oases we would not know how to breathe, and political scientists should know this. If they who must spend their lives in the

desert, trying to do this or that, constantly worrying about its conditions, do not know how to use the oases, they will become desert inhabitants even without the help of psychology. In other words, the oases, which are not places of "relaxation" but life-giving sources that let us live in the desert without becoming reconciled to it, will dry up.

The opposite danger is much more common. Its usual name is *escapism:* to escape from the world of the desert, from politics, into . . . whatever it may be, is a less dangerous and more subtle form of ruining the oases than the sandstorms that menace their existence, as it were, from without. In attempting to escape, we carry the sand of the desert into the oases—as Kierkegaard, trying to escape doubt, carried his very doubt into religion when he leaped into faith. The lack of endurance, the failure to recognize and endure doubt as one of the fundamental conditions of modern life, introduces doubt into the only realm where it should never enter: the religious, strictly speaking, the realm of faith. This is only an example to show what we are doing when we attempt to escape the desert. Because we ruin the life-giving oases when we go to them for the purpose of escaping, it sometimes seems as though everything conspires mutually to generalize the conditions of the desert.

This too is an illusion. In the last analysis, the human world is always the product of man's *amor mundi,* a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to live in it. What Hamlet said is always true: "The time is out of joint; O cursèd spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" In this sense, in its need for beginners that it may be begun anew, the world is always a desert. Yet out of the conditions of worldlessness that first appeared in the modern age—which should not be confused

with Christian *other*worldliness—grew the question of Leibniz, Schelling, and Heidegger: Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing? And out of the specific conditions of our contemporary world, which menace us not only with no-thingness but also with no-bodyness, may grow the question, Why is there anybody at all and not rather nobody? These questions may sound nihilistic, but they are not. On the contrary, they are the anti-nihilistic questions asked in the objective situation of nihilism where no-thingness and no-bodyness threaten to destroy the world.

Note: This text is the conclusion of a lecture course titled "The History of Political Theory," which Arendt gave at the University of California–Berkeley in the spring of 1955.

INDEX

academia, 104–5
Academy, 130–3
Achilles, 45, 48, 163, 166, 171, 172, 177, 185
action:
  arbitrary, 120–1
  collective, viii, 127–8, 133–4, 137–8, 186–7, 197
  meaning and, xxvii–xxviii
  principle of, xxv, 65, 68–9, 194–7
  speech vs., xxxii, 124–5, 146, 161–2, 180–1
Acton, Lord, 99
aei on (eternal), 82
Aemilianus Scipio, 184
Aeneas, 173, 183, 188
Aeneid (Virgil), 48, 173, 183
aequatio intellectus et rei, xxi
Aeschylus, 186
aesthetics, 102, 103–4
African Americans, 101
"afterthought," 6
agathos (good), 9–11
agon, 130
agora (marketplace), xxvi, 119, 131, 172
Agricola (Tacitus), 189
Alexandria, 54
alms, 138
Altheim, Franz, 179*n*, 180, 183
American Revolution, 53, 142, 197
amor mundi (love of the world), xxxii, 203
Anaxagoras, 9
ancestors, 49–50
Andromache, 48
aneu logou (without words), 118
animal laborans (laboring creature), 79
animal rationale, 60, 79
annihilation, 110
Antigone, 125
anti-nihilism, 203–4
anti-Semitism, xi
antithesis, 74
antithetical worldviews, 152
"apodictic statements," xiv
apolitia (indifference), 26
Apologeticus (Tertullian), 136
Apology (Plato), 7
archē (rule), 45–6, 83, 91
Arendt, Hannah:
  action as understood by, viii–ix, xvi, xxvii–xxviii
  desert metaphor of, xxx–xxxii
  as "difficult" thinker, xix–xxi
  early interest in philosophy of, xix–xx
  on "gap" in *Origins*, xi–xii
  growing disillusionment with Marx of, xiv–xv

Arendt, Hannah *(cont.)*
materials for work on Marx prepared by, vii, xiv
meaning of political experiences clarified by, ix–xi
"Political Experience" seminars given by, xxii–xxiii
tradition distinguished from history by, xxvii–xxix
see also specific works
aristeuein (to be the best), 165–6
aristocracy, 118, 197
Aristotle:
classes distinguished by, 91
friendship as viewed by, 20, 21
history as viewed by, 46
as philosopher, 5, 8–9, 54, 56, 79, 81
Plato compared with, 36, 56, 81, 84, 135
political philosophy of, xx, 6, 16–17, 26, 81, 82–3, 84, 115–16, 132, 135
virtue as concept of, 24
armies, 97
artists, xxxi, 9, 128, 202
Athens, xxv, 6–11, 26, 28, 108, 131, 188, 195
athletic contests, 166
atomic bomb, ix*n*, xxii, xxx, 105, 107, 109–10, 111, 147, 153–9
atomic energy, 155, 156–8
Augustine, Saint, xxviii, 56, 59, 60, 138–9
"authentic form," xii
authority:
politics and, xvii–xviii, 49–52
religion, 73
responsibility and, 77–8
tradition and, vii, 49–52, 54, 59, 73, 75

barbarians, 116, 118, 164, 170
Barrow, R. H., 51
behavior, modes of, 105
Between Past and Future (Arendt), xvi, xix
Bible, 38–9, 43–4, 50, 52, 57, 189–90
biology, 93
bios politikos, 56, 85–6
bios thēorētikos (way of life), 36–7, 56, 76, 81, 85–7
body politic, 67–8, 89, 138–9
body vs. soul debate, 27–8
Bolshevism, xi, xiii–xiv, xxxii
borders, xxx–xxxi, 180–1
Bossuet, Wilhelm, 57
bourgeoisie, 90
Burckhardt, Jacob, 40, 46–7, 164
Burke, Edmund, 69, 127

Canovan, Margaret, xx*n*
Capital (Marx), 88*n*
capitalism, 72, 117
Carthage, 184–6
categorical imperative, 169
Catholic Church, 50–2, 139–41
Cato the Elder, 174, 184
chance, 58
charity, 138
Charles I, King of England, 142*n*
chrēsimon (beneficial), 9–10
Christ and Time (Cullmann), 43
Christianity, 43–4, 50–2, 55–61, 67, 72, 73, 76
human creation in, 95–6
otherworldliness of, 203–4
political influence of, 135–41, 151
public assembly for, 138–41
in secular world, 84–5, 139–40
Cicero, xxviii, 49, 53, 82, 83, 86
cities, walls of, 180–1
citizenship, xxv–xxvi, 51, 67, 119, 131–2, 140, 179–80, 181, 182
civilization, Western:
decline of, 40–1
emergence of, 50, 53–4, 174–5

civitas, 47–9
civitas Dei, 56, 85, 139
civitas terrena, 56, 59, 84
class antagonism, 87–8
class rule, in government, 87–90, 97, 117–18
"Class Struggles in France, 1848–50, The" (Marx), 191
Clausewitz, Carl von, xxix, 191, 199–200
clemency, 183–4
coercion, 75, 121–2, 130, 148–9, 171, 192
coercive deduction, 75
Cold War, xii*n,* 199
colonization, 49–50, 176, 182–3
commonwealth, 27
communitas (community), 86–7
competition, 171
compulsion, 104, 117
conscience, 21–5
consensus omnium, 179
conservatism, xiv, 73, 110
Constantine, 50
Constitution, U.S., 159
constitutions, 130–1, 149–50
contracts, 179
contradiction, xxv, 145
correspondence theory, xxi
courage, 122
Coventry bombing raid, 154
creatura Dei (likeness of God), 79
Critique of Judgment (Kant), 168–9
Crito (Plato), 7, 182
Cullmann, Oscar, 43
Cumae, 48
"cunning of reason," 76
cynicism, 96–7

Danaeans, 173
danger, 122
Darwin, Charles, 75
death, 68
death penalty, 7, 8
deception, 130
deductive reasoning, 104
Delphic oracle, 11, 18
democracy, 69, 98, 118, 197
Denktagebuch (Arendt), 96*n*
De officiis (Cicero), 55
De res publica (Cicero), 49
desert, law of the, xxx–xxxii, 189, 190–1, 200–4
despotism, 40–1, 198
  bureaucratic rule as, 97
  enlightenment of, 119
  household, 150, 170–1, 182
determinism, 80, 126–7
dialectic, xvi, 13, 70–1, 73–4
dialegesthai (talking something through), 12–16
dictatorship, 120
diktats, 179
Discours sur l'histoire universelle (Bossuet), 57
divine providence, 57, 59, 76
doxa (opinion), 7–8, 14–16, 19–21, 25–6, 29, 33
dzōon politikon (political being), 35

ecclesiastical space, 140–1
economic development, of Western Europe, 155–6
economics, 72–3, 79–80, 98–9, 150
education, 182
egalitarianism, 118, 144
Egypt, 164
Eichmann, Adolf, xix
Eichmann in Jerusalem (Arendt), xviii–xix
eidos (model), 61
eikos (probable), 14
Eleventh Letter (Plato), 124
Engels, Friedrich, 75, 79, 90
"enlarged mentality," 168–9
enlightened despots, 119

Epictetus, 69
epistēmē (knowledge), 32
equality, xxvi–xxvii, 61–2, 66–8, 77, 94
  before God, 66–7
  in government, 67–8
  before laws, 118
  politics and, 117–20, 122–3, 170–1
escapism, 202–4
eschatology, 137
Eschenburg, Theodor, 144
Espirit des lois, L' (Montesquieu), 40–1, 194
esprit général, 65–6
ethics, 21–2
Ethics (Plato), 12–13
Europe, Western, 40–1, 98–9, 114, 120, 146, 175
  colonization by, 176
  economic development of, 155–6
  historical development of, xi–xii, 40–1
Euthyphro (Plato), xxxiii*n*
evil:
  banality of, xviii–xix
  destructiveness of, xxx
evolution, 75, 112–13
exploitation, 117
exploration, 176
"externalities," 107

faith, 111, 203
falsa infinita (limitless falsehoods), 14
fame, 164, 173–4, 195
familia, 170
family, 48, 91, 93–4, 121–3, 150
  in Roman civilization, 170–1, 173–4
fate, 59, 125
fathers, 170–1, 182
Faust (Goethe), 73
fear, 24–5, 65, 67, 68–9, 97, 139, 153
force:
  brute, 146–53, 154, 161–2, 164, 165, 171–2, 191, 193, 199
  power compared with, 146–53
foreign policy, 98–9, 129, 145, 165, 180, 199–200
forgiveness, 57–8
fortune, 125
France, 156
freedom, 80, 95
  academic, 131–2, 136
  constitutional, 130–1
  danger and, xxviii–xxix, 145–6
  government and, 117–18, 141–3
  independence and, 163–4
  isolation compared with, 169–70
  judgment and, ix–xi, xxii–xxiii, 200–1
  as liberation, 116–17, 132, 141 (liberty)
  mental, 167–9
  miracle of, 113
  of movement, 128–9
  necessity and, 120–1, 142
  opinion and, xxv, 125–6, 133
  physical, 168
  political, 108–11, 116–17
  protection of, 146–7
  religious, 136–7
  restriction of, 133–4, 136, 138–9, 170–1
  space for, 170–1, 182
French Revolution, 41, 53, 126, 142
friendship, xxx–xxxi, 16, 202–3
  Aristotle's view of, 20, 21
  political element in, 17–18

Germany:
  bombing campaigns against, 154
  economic development of, 155
global dominion, 97–8
glory, xxviii, 45, 46, 173–4

gnōthi sauton (know thyself), 18–21
God, 21–2, 38–9, 50, 57
  commandments of, x
  contemplation of, 76
  equality before, 66–7
  family created by, 94
  man created by, xxx, 94, 95–6
  as "measure of all things," 73
  oneness of, 61
  power of, 68
  state of, 139
gods, xxxiii, 127, 163
  in Homer, 48, 163
  household, 48, 173
  Roman, 50, 137
  quarrels of, 166
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 40, 41, 73
good life, 17, 132
goodness, 137
goodwill, 111
Gorgias, 177, 181–2
Gospels, 57, 138, 140
government:
  bureaucracy of, 77–8, 97
  class rule in, 87–90, 97, 117–18
  constitutional, 130–1, 149–50, 159, 161
  equality in, 67–8
  freedom and, 117–18, 141–3
  legislative, 179–80
  Marxist analysis of, 88–92
  nature of, 63–4
  philosophers in, 27, 31–2, 52–3
  power of, 146–53
  in public life, 52, 139, 142–3
  regulation by, 191–2
  world, 97
greatness, 46–7, 173–4
Greece:
  city-states of, xxix–xxx, 6, 9, 16, 47–9, 60, 77, 82, 114, 116, 121, 123–4, 129, 130–1, 133, 134, 164–5, 169–70, 171, 178, 181–3, 187, 195
  colonies of, 182–3, 187
  destruction of, 183, 188
  history of, 44–5, 47–9, 52–6, 60, 124–5, 162–8
  political life of, xxix–xxx, 117–18, 119, 124–30
  private vs. public life in, 14–15, 52–3, 91, 127–9, 131–2, 138, 167, 171–2
  Rome influenced by, xxix–xxx, 54, 55, 163, 172–9, 183–4, 188
  traditions of, 52–6, 58, 162–8
Greek language, 122, 165, 169
Greek philosophy, development of, 5, 42, 52–6, 85–6
Griechische Kulturgeschichte (Burckhardt), 164
guilt, 57–8

Hamlet, 203
Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought (Canovan), xx*n*
Hannibal, 184
happiness, 142
Hebrews, 42
  see also Jews, Judaism
Hector, 48–9, 163, 166, 171, 177
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich:
  Marx compared with, xxviii, 70–80, 86, 87, 92
  "owl of Minerva" concept of, 5
  political philosophy of, 30, 31, 36, 57, 66, 86, 87, 92
Heidegger, Martin, xv, xx, xxvii*n,* 55, 204
Helen, 173
Hellas, 183
Heraclitus, 130, 166, 174–5, 180–1
Hercules, 127
Herder, Johann Gottfried von, 66

Hereafter, 7, 13
hermits, 137
Herodotus, 45, 46, 124, 164, 189
heroism, 45, 46–7, 123, 127, 162–8, 173–4
Hiroshima bombing, 153–4
"historic greatness," 46–7
history:
  absolute in, 70–80
  ancient, xxviii, 113, 140–1, 162–8, 171, 197
  beginnings in, 111–12
  catastrophes in, 105, 106–7, 108, 110, 145–6, 155–6, 176, 191–2
  consciousness of, 43–5
  crises in, 102–3
  development of, xvi, 120–1, 174–5
  end of, 70
  evidence of, 161–2
  forces of, 98
  of ideas, 72–3, 75
  impartiality in, 164, 177–8
  judgment of, xxiii, 163–4
  law of, 88–9
  "locomotives" of, 191
  miracles in, 111–13, 114
  necessity of, 95, 120–1
  pessimism and, 40
  political, 95, 119–20, 174–5
  prejudices in, 101–3
  radical change and, 42–3
  spiritual, xxviii, 43–4
  study of, 104–5, 172
  subterranean currents of, xiii, 40–1
  tradition and, xxvii–xxix, 42–3, 49–52, 92
"History of Political Theory, The" (Arendt), 204*n*
Hitler, Adolf, 160
Hobbes, Thomas, xii*n*, 38, 67, 95
hoi polloi (multitude), 84–5
holiness, 137
Holy Family, 94
home, household, 48–9, 52, 117, 121–2, 132, 134, 149, 170–1
Homer, xxix, 44, 46, 48, 55, 83, 123–4, 125, 162–8, 173–4, 177, 184, 195
homines religiosi, 58
homo faber, 60, 79, 80
honor, 65
hope, 97, 153
housebuilding, 156
hubris, 181
Human Condition, The (Arendt), xvi, xvii, 11*n*
Hungarian Revolution, 142
hydrogen bomb, 154
hypocrisy, 137

"ideocracy," xxvi
ideologies, xxiii, 103, 152
idion, 129*n*, 142
Iliad (Homer), 184
Ilians, 174
immoderateness, 186–7
immortality, 46, 161, 172, 174, 181–2, 195
imperialism, 98–9, 160
Imperium Romanum, 185–6
individualism, 85, 99, 122, 127–8, 130, 141, 169–70, 175
industrial revolution, 43, 155
"infinite improbabilities," 111–13
infinity, 43–4
inorganic processes, 112–13
intellectualism, 104–5, 107
internal combustion engine, 155
"Introduction *into* Politics" (Arendt), viii–ix, xvi–xix, 93–200
irony, xxxi–xxxii
isasthēnai (equalizing), 17
isēgoria , 124
isolation, 169–70
isonomia (free constitution), 118, 124

Japan, xxii, 153–4, 158–60
Jaspers, Karl, viii, xv
Jenenser Realphilosophie (Hegel), 76
Jesus Christ, xxviii, 6, 43–4, 50, 56, 57–9
  Socrates compared with, 137
Jews, Judaism, xi, xix, 42, 50, 101, 138, 161, 164
John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, xi
Judeo-Christian tradition, 95–6, 189–90
judgment:
  faculty of, 200–4
  freedom and, ix–xi, xxiii, 200–1
  impartial, 163–4, 181–2
  prejudice and, 99–108
  reason and, 168–9
  standards of, ix–xi
Jünger, Ernst, 191
justice, practice of, 138

kalon (beautiful), 10–11
Kant, Immanuel, xx, xxviii, 55, 57, 59–60, 76, 102, 113, 126, 198, 200
  "unwritten political philosophy" of, 169*n*
"Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Thought" (Arendt), vii–viii*n*
Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye, xv, 33
kings, 78–9, 92, 172, 195, 198
kinship, 93–4
Kohn, Jerome, vii–xxxii
koinon (common), 14, 167

labor, xvi, 154–7
laboring class, 78, 79–80, 83–4, 132, 144, 148–9
Lake Constance horseman, 192
Latins, 183
Lavater, Johann Kaspar, 41
Lavinia, 173
laws, 24, 26
  constitutional, 130–1
  divine, 50
  equality before, 118
  Greek, xxix–xxx, 88–9, 178–9, 182–3
  international, 178–9
  limits set by, 180–1
  natural, x
  obedience to, 181–2
  power and, 63–5, 69, 179
  Roman, xxix–xxx, 49, 178–80, 185, 187, 189–90
  universal, 88–9
Laws (Plato), 11, 13, 57, 61, 64
Lebensraum, 159
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 55, 204
Lenin, V. I., xiii, 77, 126, 191
  Marx compared with, 89
Leviathan (Hobbes), xii*n*
lexis (speech), 31, 61–2
liberalism, 110
liberation, 116–17
libertas, 169
liberum arbitrium, 169
life:
  annihilation of, 153–8
  communal, 114–16, 131–4
  freedom and, 146–7
  necessities of, 132, 134, 135
  organic, 111–12, 145
  origins of, 111–12
  politics and, 144–5
  preservation of, 109, 115
  risk of, 122, 145–6
Life of the Mind, The (Arendt), xvi, xviii
Logik (Hegel), 92
logos (speech), 23–4, 33
love, xxx–xxxi, 139, 202–3
Ludz, Ursula, xvii
Luke, Gospel of, 57
Luther, Martin, 84–5

Machiavelli, Niccoló, 38
Madison, James, 85, 115
maieutic (art of midwifery), 15
maiores (ancestors), 49–50
man:
  creative vs. destructive nature of, 146–7, 154–8
  extermination of, 153–62
  nature of, 104–8
  as "political animal," 115–16, 169
  relationships of, 155, 161–2, 176–80, 190–1, 200–4
man-to-man combat, 166–7
marriage, 179
Marx, Karl:
  Arendt's analysis of, vii, xi–xvi, xxi
  Hegel compared with, xxix, 70–80, 86, 87, 92
  historical analysis by, 88–9, 153
  Lenin compared with, 89
  Plato compared with, 91–2
  as political philosopher, ix, xxviii–xxix, 38, 53, 86, 88–92
Marxism, vii, xi–xiv, 72, 88–92, 120
materialism, 17, 72
Matthew, Gospel of, 57, 138
meaninglessness, 110–11
"Melian Dialogue, The" (Thucydides), 165
memory, 177
mercy, 57
metaphors, 29
metaphysics, 55
Metaphysics (Aristotle), 54
Middle Ages, 51, 139–40, 141
modern age, 40–1, 54, 84, 103, 104–5, 109–10, 141
  politics in, ix, 142–53, 200–4
  warfare in, 146–53
Moe, H. A., xii*n*, xiv
Mommsen, Theodor, 122, 163, 170, 184, 186
monarchy, 63, 65, 66, 78–9, 92, 170–1, 172, 195, 197, 198
Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de, xxvi–xxviii, 40–1, 63–9, 87, 194, 195
morality:
  common sense and, 41
  politics and, 45
  standards of, x
mortality, 122, 123
mortal sins, 161
murder, 22–3, 161

nationalism, xi
nation-states, 98–9, 109, 142–3
  historiography of, 189
nature, 95, 111–12
  energy in, 156–8
  exploitation of, 154–8
Nazism, xxxii
neo-Aristotelianism, 56
neo-Platonism, 56
New Testament, 50, 52, 57, 138
Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle), 16–17
Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, xv, xx, xxviii, 35, 60, 71, 72, 85, 99, 200
  Plato compared with, 73
nihilism, 103, 203–4
nomos (universal law), 88–9, 178–9, 186–7
nomothetēs (lawgiver), 182–3
noncontradiction, xxv
nous (philosophical spirit), 33
nuclear war, ix*n*, xxii, xxx, 105, 107, 109–10, 111, 147, 153–9
numen (holy ways), 49

obedience, 118, 164–5, 181–2
oblivion, 46
occidental philosophical tradition, 5–6, 37–8
October Revolution (1917), 78

Oedipus, 25
oligarchy, 118, 133–4
Olympus, 49
On Revolution (Arendt), xvi, xvii, xix
ontology, xxxii
opinion:
  freedom and, xxv, 125–6, 133
  truth vs., 7–8, 13–16, 25–6, 33, 34–9
  see also doxa
oratory, orators, 133, 166–7
  see also speech
organic life, 111–12, 145
Origins of Totalitarianism (Arendt), vii, xi, xii, xviii
otium (leisure), 82, 117

parasitical activities, 149
parcere subiectis (sparing of the vanquished), 184
pardon, 58
Paris, 173
Parmenides, 114, 130
parties, political, 98
pater familias, 170
pathos (something which is endured), 32–4
patricians, 179–80
patriotism, 189
pax Romana, 50, 189
pedagogy, 162–3
peithein (to persuade), 7
Peithō , 7, 164
Peloponnesian War, 44
penates (household gods), 48, 173
Pergamus, 173
Pericles, 10, 26, 108, 124, 172
Perpetual Peace (Kant), 198
Persian Empire, 182, 183
Persian Wars, 183, 187
"perspectival thinking," 72
persuasion, 7–8, 13–16, 134–5, 164
Phaedo (Plato), 7
Phaedrus (Plato), 162
Phidias, 172
philia (friendship), 16, 17–18
  see also friendship
philopsychia (clinging to life), 122
philosopher-kings, xiv, 84, 92, 132–3
philosophers:
  contemplative life of, 76, 83–7, 91–2, 202
  as "gadflies," 15
  as love of wisdom, 9
  as members of communities, 8–9, 16–17, 19–21, 25–6, 83–5
  politics avoided by, 26–7, 37–8, 81–4, 95, 133, 151
  pre-Socratic, 23
  as rulers, 10, 84
  self-investigation by, 18–21
  truth as goal of, 25–6, 34–9
  see also specific philosophers
philosophy:
  analysis in, xx–xxi
  causality in, 56–7
  common sense vs., 30, 35–6, 38
  development of Greek, 5, 42, 52–6, 85–6
  doubt and, 55
  Marxist analysis of, 75–6
  medieval, 55–7
  occidental tradition of, 5–6, 37–8
  origin of, 32–9, 54–5
  political influence of, xi, xxix, 9–10, 27–31
  post-Platonic, 26
  Roman, 53–4
  science and, 34, 93
  theology and, 93
  Western tradition of, 47, 55–6, 86–7, 95, 138–9
  see also political philosophy
Philosophy of Right (Hegel), 5*n*
phronēsis (political insight), 9, 33, 168
phronimos (understanding man), 9

Pindar, 46
Piper, Klaus, xvii
Plato:
  Academy of, 130–3
  Aristotle compared with, 36, 56, 81, 84, 135
  "cave" of, 29–31, 56
  dialogues of, xxxi*n*, 13, 15, 21, 25
  hierarchical values of, 71
  ideas as concept of, xxv, 8, 10–11, 24, 29–31, 37, 53, 85, 130–1
  Marx compared with, 91–2
  Nietzsche compared with, 73
  as philosopher, xx, 5, 8–9, 36–7, 54–5, 56, 81, 91–2, 130, 132–3
  poetry as viewed by, 162
  political philosophy of, xiv, xx, xxv–xxvii, 6, 8, 11, 28–31, 37–8, 57, 64, 73, 81–2, 84, 91, 93, 108, 114, 130–5
  slavery as viewed by, 52–3
  Socrates compared with, 15
  Socrates' relationship with, xxv–xxvi, 33
  Socrates' trial as viewed by, 6–8, 36
  soul as conceived by, 27–8
plebes, 179–80
plurality, xviii, xxv–xxvi, xxxii, 20–1
Poetics (Aristotle), 46
poetry, xxviii, 44, 83, 162–8, 172, 177
police forces, 97
polis, 6, 9, 16, 25, 26, 45, 46, 182
"Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century" (Arendt), xxii–xxiii
political philosophy:
  absolute standards in, 8
  of Aristotle, xx, 6, 16–17, 26, 81, 82–3, 84, 115–16, 132, 135
  change effected by, 75–80
  development of, 6
  foundations of, 46–54
  of Hegel, 30, 31, 36, 57, 66, 86, 87, 92
  history of, 70–80
  Kant's "unwritten", 169*n*
  man's nature in, 104–8
  of Plato, xiv, xx, xxv–xxvii, 6, 8, 11, 28–31, 37–8, 57, 64, 73, 81–2, 84, 91, 93, 108, 114, 130–5
  of Socrates, 11–12, 18, 22–3
  tradition of, ix, xiii, xxv, 26–7, 40–62, 73–4, 81–92, 143–4
politics:
  abolition of, 97
  action in, xxv–xxix, 113–14, 192–4
  Aristotelian conception of, 115–16
  authority and, 49–52
  avoidance of, 105–6, 133–4, 135, 152–3, 202–4
  Christian influence on, 135–41, 151
  common sense and, 41–2
  contemporary, 196–200
  contemporary relevance of, 191–200
  custom and, 40–1
  definition of, 93–6, 114–15, 117
  degradation of, 133–5
  destructiveness of, 174–5
  ends vs. means in, 150–2, 198–9
  equality and, 117–20, 122–3, 170–1
  family relationships and, 93–4
  fear and, 68–9
  fragility of, xix–xx
  freedom and, 108–11, 116–17
  goals of, 82–3, 192–200
  in human nature, 93–6
  instinct in, 70
  institutions of, xxxii, 144–5
  judgment and, 99–108
  leisure and, 82, 83, 84, 117
  Marxist analysis of, 70–80
  meaninglessness and, 110–11
  meaning of, xix–xxi, 108–53
  modern, 142–53, 200–4

necessity of, 115–17, 131–5, 144–5, 151–3
opposition to, 108, 113–14
Platonic conception of, 114
plurality and, viii–xix, 95–6
prejudices and, ix, 96–108, 151–3
private vs. public spheres in, 114–15, 122–3, 127–9, 135–40, 142, 149–51
progress in, 155–6
rejection of, 133–4, 135, 137–8
religion and, 135–41
revolutionary, 53, 75–6, 77
space for, 104–8, 119–20, 131–2, 167, 170, 193
standards of, 130–1
as term, 45–6
Politics (Plato), 46
politikos (political man), 168, 181
Polybius, 118
populus Romanus (Roman nation), 179
"possessor of force," 146
post-Platonic philosophy, 26
poverty, 89
power:
absolute, 99, 148–50, 162
abuse of, 40–1
arbitrary, 77–8
corruption by, 99
domination and, 148–9
force compared with, 146–53
manipulation of, 105
military, 146–53, 162–8
nature of, 63*n*–4*n*
nonviolent, 166
state, 87–8, 109, 115, 143, 146–53
use of, 99, 143, 196–200
violence as basis of, 87–8, 117, 130, 146–53, 161, 165
pragmatism, 85–6
praise, 45
praxis (action), 31, 46, 58–9, 61–2, 65–6, 76, 83, 92
predetermination, 126–7
prejudgments, ix, x, 102–3
Priam, 173, 184
production, 154–6, 161–2, 181
productivity, 79–80, 107–8, 110, 128, 141, 149–50
proletariat, ix, 90, 120
Protagoras, 10
Protestantism, 51, 72
pseudoreligions, 111
pseudotheories, 102–3
psychology, 93, 107, 194–5
public life:
government in, 52, 139, 142–3
private vs., 132, 134, 138, 170–1
punishment, 24–5

racism, xi
Ranke, Leopold von, 144, 199
"rational animal," 23
rationalism, 23, 76
reality:
common, x–xi
historical, xxii
manifold of, xxix, 167–8
perspective of, xxii–xxiii, 128–9
relationships in, 112, 155
reason, reasoning:
deductive, 104
judgment and, 168–9
Reformation, 51, 140
religion, 6, 21–2, 135–41
authority of, 73
doubt and, 203
freedom and, 136–7
history and, xxi, 43–4, 104–5, 172, 191
miracles in, 111
monotheistic, 61, 95–6
tradition and, 49–52, 54, 59, 73
see also Christianity; Jews, Judaism
republic, 63, 66–7, 195
Republic (Plato), 11, 17, 29, 64, 84

responsibility, 77–8
Responsibility and Judgment (Ardent), x*n*, xix
res publica (republic), viii, 170, 180
"revaluation of values," 71–2
revolution, ix, 53, 75–6, 77, 142, 191–2
Rhetoric (Plato), 12–13
risk, 122
Robespierre, Maximilien, 198
Rockefeller Foundation, xvii
Roman civilization, 42–3, 47–50, 73, 86, 120, 121–2
  Christianity and, 137–9, 140
  fall of, 188–90
  family in, 170–1, 173–4
  founding of, 126, 163, 172–7, 184–5
  laws of, xxix–xxx, 49, 178–80, 185, 187, 189–90
  patricians vs. plebes in, 179–80
  private vs. public life in, 132, 134, 138, 170–1
  Republican period of, xxix–xxx, 180
  treaties and alliances of, xxx–xxxi, 175–80, 186, 188–91
  warfare by, 160
  as world power, 184–91
Romans, The (Barrow), 51
Römische Geschichte (Mommsen), 122
Romulus, 173
"ruse of nature," 76
Russian Revolution, xi, xiii–xiv, xxii

saints, 139
Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 55, 204
scholasticism, 55–6
scholē (leisure), 82, 83, 84, 117
science:
  nuclear, xxii, xxix, 154
  philosophy and, 34, 93
Scipio the Elder, 184
Selbstverständlichkeiten (plausibilities), 55
self:
  agreement with, 168–9
  knowledge of, 18–21
servitude, 121–2, 170–1
Seventh Letter (Plato), 32, 127
sin, 84, 161
slavery, xxvi, 28, 52–3, 67, 80, 91, 116–17, 118, 121–2, 134, 182
social sciences, 72–3
societas (human community), 50, 185–6
society:
  "classless," 77
  custom and, 40–1
  development of, 149–50
  individuals vs., 142
  prejudices in, 100–1
  progress of, x
  religion and, 139
  resources of, 110
socii (allies), 50
Socrates, 5–39
  death penalty for, 7, 8
  Jesus compared with, 137
  laws observed by, 181–2
  marketplace as forum of, 14–15
  opinions investigated by, 7–8, 14–16, 19–23
  philosophic method of, xxv–xxvi, xxxi–xxxii, 11–12, 14–16, 19–21, 25
  Plato compared with, 15
  political philosophy of, 11–12, 18, 22–3
  school of, 33
  "traumatic states" of, 33
  trial of, xxv, 6–11, 26–7, 36
solitude, xxvi, 21–5, 36, 85–6
Sophists, 133, 167
sophoi (wise men), 8–9, 11

sovereignty, 142–3
Soviet Union, xiv, 159, 200
space:
  force and, 147–9
  legal, 189–90
  societal, 142
species, 112–13
speech:
  action vs., xxxii, 124–5, 146, 161–2, 180–1
  freedom of, 118, 128–9, 130
  see also lexis; logos; oratory, orators
Spinoza, Baruch, 83
spontaneity, 59–60, 113, 125–6, 128
Staat und Gesellschaft in Deutschland (Eschenburg), 144
Stalin, Joseph, xiii
State and Revolution, The (Lenin), 89
Statesman (Plato), 64, 91, 168*n*
supernatural, 111–13, 158
superstition, 111
synthesis, 74

Tacitus, Cornelius, 185, 189
taste, 102, 103–4
technology, xxii, xxix, 155–7, 162
  development of, 155–6
Ten Commandments, 189
Tertullian, 84, 136
Thales of Miletus, 9
thaumadzein (wonder), 32–9, 54
Theaetetus (Plato), 32, 54
theōrein (seeing), 56
thesis, 74
Thesis on Feuerbach, 75–6, 77
Thomas Aquinas, Saint, 56
thought:
  action vs., xi, 6, 81, 85–6, 103
  complexity of, xx–xxi
  compulsory, 104
  prejudices in, 96–7, 103–4
  speculative, x
  unity of, xxi
Thucydides, 44, 46, 124, 165, 172
Tocqueville, Alexis de, 38
"Totalitarian Elements in Marxism" (Arendt), vii
totalitarianism:
  annihilation of, 158–60
  freedom denied by, 108–11, 120–1
  global domination by, 97–8
  historical development of, xi–xii
  ideology of, 74–80
  Marxism and, vii, xi–xiv
  origins of, xii–xiii, 74–80
  power abused by, 40–1
  psychology of, 200–4
  solitude abolished by, 24–5
  violence as basis of, x, 68–9
tradition:
  authority and, vii, 49–52, 54, 59, 73, 75
  in Greece, 52–6, 58, 162–8
  history and, xxvii–xxix, 42–3, 49–52, 92
  Judeo-Christian, 95–6, 189–90
  of occidental philosophy, 5–6, 37–8
  of political philosophy, ix, xiii, xxv, 26–7, 40–62, 73–4, 81–92, 143–4
  religion and, 49–52, 54, 59, 73
  of Western philosophy, 47, 55–6, 86–7, 95, 138–9
"Tradition and the Modern Age" (Arendt), xvi
tragedy, 58, 125, 187
Trojan War, xxx, 48, 162–8, 170–8
truth:
  absolute, 8, 14, 19, 71
  eternal, 12–13
  inherent, 17–18
  judgment and, 100–2

truth *(cont.)*
opinion vs., 7–8, 13–16, 25–6, 33, 34–9
Platonic, xxvii, 7–8
reality as, xxi
tyranny of, xxvii
Turnus, 173
Twelve Tables, 179
"twin peoples," 163, 173
twins, identical, 62
tyranny, 63, 64, 65, 68–9
rule of, 77–8, 89–90, 119, 123–4
see also despotism; dictatorship

Ulysses, 48–9
unconditional surrender, 158–60
United States:
prejudice in, 101
Soviet relations of, 159, 200
technological development of, 155–6
universality, 103
unum verum (one truth), 14
utopias, 53, 97, 109, 153, 196

values, hierarchy of, 71–2
verisimilia, 14
Virgil, xxix, 48, 173, 183, 188
virtue, 65, 66, 69
as Aristotlean concept, 24
political, 168–9
vita activa, 56
vita contemplativa, 56
Volksgeist (spirit of a people), 66

war, 117, 124
annihilation in, xxviii, 153–62, 163, 164, 171–8, 191
bombing campaigns in, 153–4, 158–60
"as father of all things," 166, 174–5
goals of, 158–60
necessity of, 153–91
negotiations in, 158–60, 176–80, 199–200
political, 164–5
as "politics by other means," xxviii, 146, 165, 183–4, 191, 199–200
total, xxviii, 146–53, 158–60, 162, 163
unconditional surrender in, 158–60
"war of all against all," 67–8, 95
wealth, accumulation of, 117
Weber, Max, 72
Weltgeist (world spirit), 66, 70–1
Western philosophical tradition, 47, 55–6, 86–7, 95, 138–9
"will, freedom of, 113–14, 169
wisdom, 137
women, emancipation of, 144, 148
working class, *see* laboring class
world, destruction of, xxix–xxxii, 153–62, 174–5
World War I, xxii, 109, 147–8
World War II, xxii, 153–60

Zeus, 130
zoology, 93